OLD!

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retro GAMER* 鉄拳

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INSIDE COLIN MCRAE RALLY
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FUTURE
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THE MAKING OF GIMMICK!
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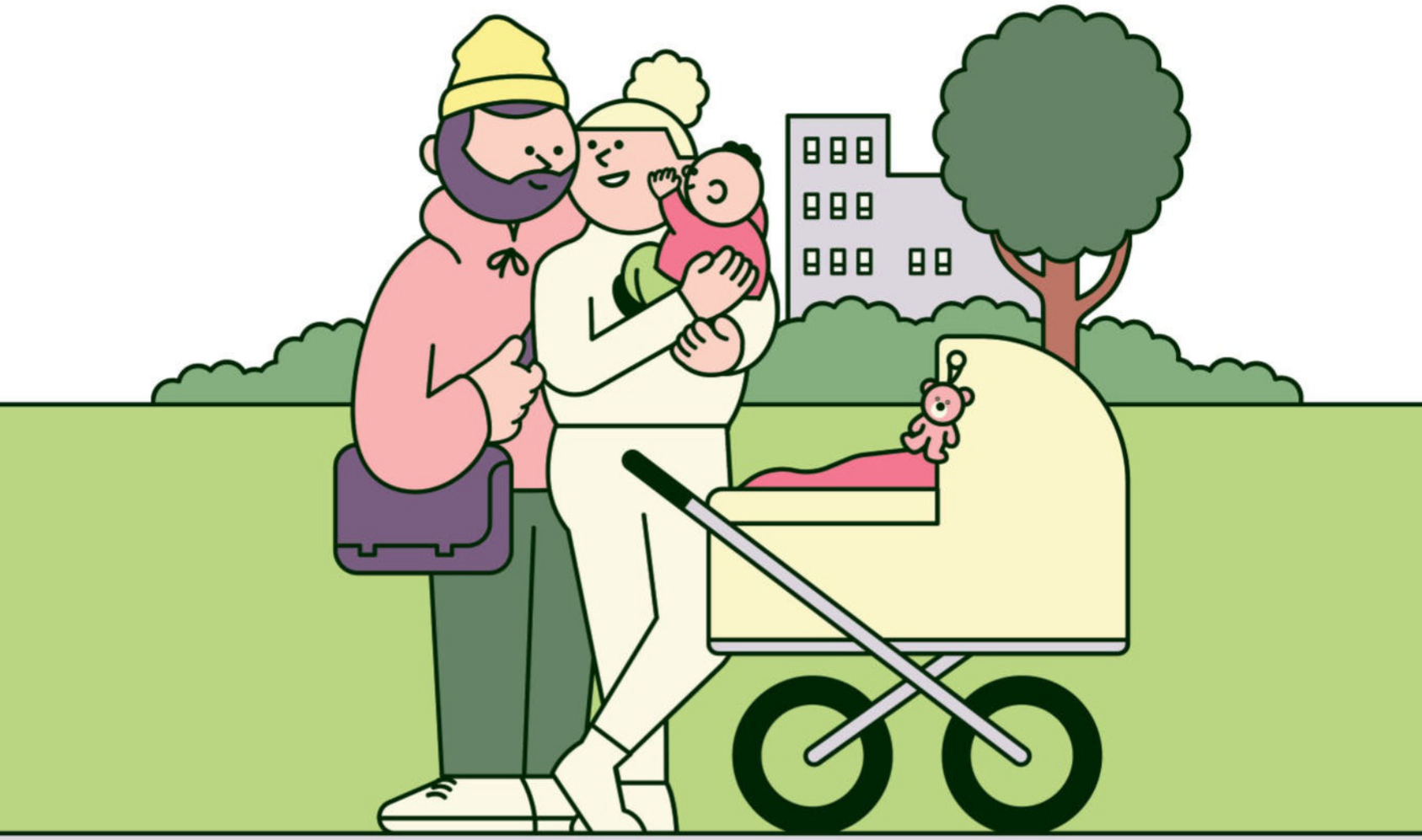

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE TEKKEN GAME?

DARRAN JONES

I'm rather partial to the excellent *Tekken 5*, and not just because you can unlock *Starblade* and the first three *Tekken* games.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *FIST: Forged In Shadow Torch*
Favourite game of all time: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

TIM EMPEY

I bought a PlayStation just so I could play *Tekken 2*. Though I do have a soft spot for *Tekken Tag Tournament* and, oddly enough, *Tekken 4*.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently Playing: *Baldur's Gate III* (on my second playthrough now)
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

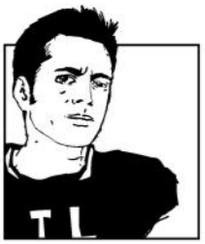
I love *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* on the PSP. It was technically impressive and played brilliantly, but more importantly it helped me make friends with a reclusive flatmate at university.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Sonic X Shadow Generations* (big surprise!)
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

Tekken 2 was the first one I played which I had on the PlayStation. I spent hours learning King's Five-Throw Combo.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

RORY MILNE

Tekken 3's innovations are cool, especially sidestepping into and out of the background, and the limits on jumping to avoid attacks.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Pitfall!*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*



IAIN LEE

The first *Tekken* game on the Playstation. I had never seen anything like it in my actual home. I became obsessed but was absolutely no good at it at all.
Expertise: Buying expensive stuff on eBay then never touching it
Currently playing: *Dead Cells*
Favourite game of all time: *Elite* (BBC Model B)

ADAM BARNES

Tekken 5. Not because I think it's the best, but because it was the first game I ever reviewed professionally.
Expertise: Being pretentious about coffee
Currently playing: *Balatro*
Favourite game of all time: *Baldur's Gate*

ANDREW FISHER

Tekken 3 on the original PlayStation for me. I enjoyed the main game and the Tekken Force subgame.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Squirrel With A Gun*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

PAUL ROSE

I'm going to say the first *Tekken* on the PlayStation, because that's about the only one I remember with any actual clarity!
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Astro Bot*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

LOADING...

It's certainly *Tekken* a long time, but Namco's iconic fighting series finally graces our front cover. And what a piece of art, eh? *Tekken*'s distinctive combatants seemed to be found in the home of every PlayStation owner back in the Nineties, such was the franchise's impact on the system. Namco's game dominated in the arcades as well, and in the last 30 years, it has taken first place as the dominant 3D fighting game of choice. It's been a real treat then to chat to Katsuhiro Harada about how the famous fighter has evolved over the last three decades and why he'd love to see some competition for the popular brawler.

Outside of our excellent *Tekken* coverage, we go behind the scenes of *World Of Warcraft*, *Gimmick!* and *The Thing*, look at the many amazing games to be found on Capcom's CPS-1 hardware and find out what Arc System Works has planned for the latest game in the *Double Dragon* series. We also revisit the excellent *Stunt Race FX*, look at the *Colin McRae Rally* series and discover why *Fairlight* was such an iconic isometric Spectrum hit. And while we're on the subject of iconic isometric Spectrum games, be sure to enjoy the excellent calendar we've put together for you that features everything from *Head Over Heels* and *Knight Lore* to *Bobby Bearing* and *Hydrofool*.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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Music plays a huge part in a videogame's appeal, as Iain mentions in his latest column

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This month we talk to the talented Jamie Woodhouse about his brand-new sequel to *Retro Racing*

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Do you remember the highs and lows of May 2008? Nick does, but that's because he was literally just there

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Darran thought it would be fun to investigate the many games Capcom released for its once cutting-edge hardware. Silly Darran

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Who would have thought that Microsoft's debug kit for the original Xbox would now be worth a small fortune?

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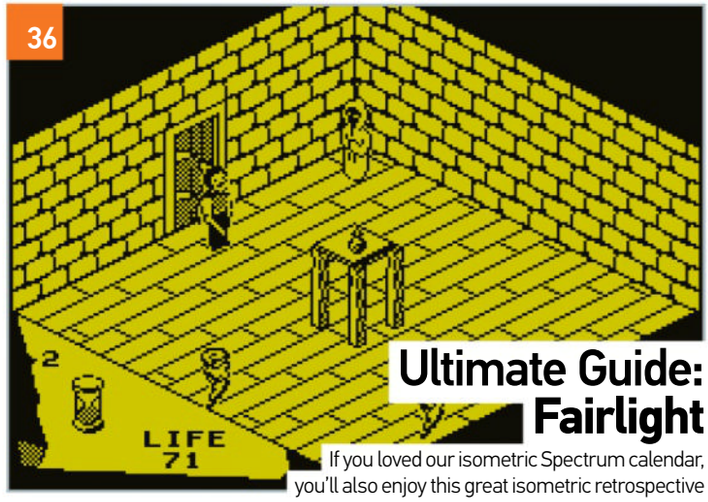
Tekken: The Undisputed King

Katsuhiro Harada on the mechanics, characters and community that have shaped Namco's fighter over the last 30 years



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Ultimate Guide: Fairlight

If you loved our isometric Spectrum calendar, you'll also enjoy this great isometric retrospective

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» Analogue's new console will feature both black and white models.

HARDWARE HEAVEN

Analogue unveils its love letter to the Nintendo 64

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12 A MOMENT WITH
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14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
Nick touches down in another turbulent month, but what will he find there? You'll have to read it to find out

When it comes to quality, Analogue is considered one of the best hardware manufacturers around. Yes, its items can take a long time to ship, and yes they're typically very expensive, but when it comes to quality Analogue is tough to beat.

Over the last few years it has worked on a variety of high-end products, from the Analogue Duo, to the Analogue Pocket, but its latest offering has the potential to be one of its most significant releases yet and it also represents an interesting leap forward for Analogue.

Although it was announced some time back, Analogue has finally released images of its incoming Analogue^{3D}, its love letter to the Nintendo 64. Aside from being the first full 3D console that Analogue has worked on, the system is also significant due to the fact that it's Analogue's first system to output to 4K (previous systems have all targeted 1080p).

Analogue is no stranger to hyperbole and its press release promises that its own take on the popular console is going to be transformative. "While a very few modern upscalers have transformed the 2D era of videogames with pixel-perfect clarity, the N64 demands something far more radical: the unmistakable essence of a CRT."

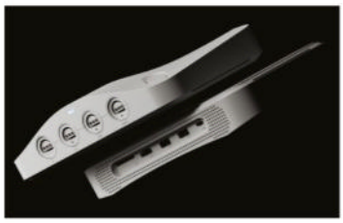
Of course, anyone who has experienced the likes of Mike Chi's RetroTink 4K or seen the incoming Morph 4K will be aware just how good classic systems can look on modern TVs with a good upscaler, so we're interested to see how the Analogue^{3D} fares, particularly as we've been incredibly impressed by the performance of the RetroTink 4K when linked to an N64. "Analogue^{3D} is designed with a bespoke, purpose-built 4K upscaler. A faithful lag-free way to re-experience the N64. It's N64 reborn," continues Analogue.

The company is promising that its newly designed tech will replicate CRTs of old thanks to the system's Original Display Modes and promises to capture "the warmth, depth, and texture in every frame", including the "soft glow of phosphor", and "immersive scanlines and shadow masks". Those are some bold claims, but based on what we've seen Analogue achieve in the past it's highly possible.

One area of the Analogue^{3D} that may upset hardcore fans of the N64 is the system's joypad (available to

» Analogue always makes nice-looking hardware and the Analogue^{3D} is no exception.

> "The most impressive aspect of the Analogue^{3D} is that it offers 100% compatibility across the entire N64 library, something which has never been accurately recreated before"



» The Analogue^{3D} has a variety of inputs, including HDMI, USB and SD card slots.

» Many are hoping the built-in Wi-Fi is for online multiplayer, as Analogue has been selling the multiplayer aspect, but we'd imagine it's just for system updates.

» The 3D^{OS} is Analogue's new operating system. It has been created specifically for use on the Analogue^{3D} only.

» Analogue promises 100% compatibility across the entire N64 cartridge range.

buy separately for $39.99). Rather than mimic the distinct three-prong approach of the original N64 pad, Analogue's offering looks more like the contemporary pads of today, with a more conventional layout. The device has been built in collaboration with 8BitDo and it will be possible to update the controller by simply plugging it into the console.

By far the most impressive aspect of the Analogue^{3D} is that it offers 100% compatibility across the entire N64 library, something which has never been accurately recreated before. "Analogue spent four years engineering it in FPGA," the press release continues. "No more incompatibilities found in software emulation like input lag, graphic/audio inaccuracies, timing/framerate issues and more. For the first time, you can re-experience the N64 exactly as it was meant to be, without compromise."

Outside of its compatibility support, four years of lengthy FPGA development and an overhaul of Analogue's OS, which has been specifically tailored for the new system, it's the price point that has become the biggest surprise. The Analogue^{3D} is available to preorder now and retails for $249.99, that's incredibly low for a piece of hardware that promises so much. Admittedly, it doesn't come with a controller, which pushes the price point nearer to $300 (and shipping/custom charges also need to be considered) but it's impressive how Analogue has been able to target such a low price (when you consider the bespoke nature of the product).

In addition to being 100% compatible with the entire N64 library, the Analogue^{3D} will also be compatible with all existing N64 peripherals (*Hey You, Pikachu!* fans rejoice) and will be region free as well. You won't even need to worry about buying the increasingly expensive Expansion Pak, as that's built into the actual system. We'll hopefully have more news on the console in a later issue, otherwise you can expect a review for Analogue's new piece of kit in late-2025. ✱

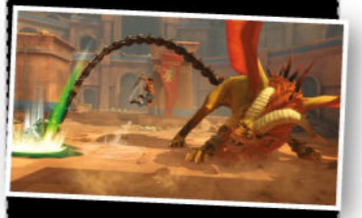
You can preorder the Analogue^{3D} now by visiting store.analogue.co

CHEAP THRILLS

Prices for the notoriously expensive PS2 survival horror game *Rule Of Rose* have been dropping significantly after many legitimate sealed copies were discovered recently in Italy. The game used to fetch over £600 sealed, but that price is falling as Italian eBay sellers are selling it for between £240 and £300. That's still a lot of dough of course, but it highlights that some games aren't as rare as you think they are.

THE LAST CROWN?

Prince Of Persia: The Lost Crown was not only one of the best Metroidvania games in recent years, but also a brilliant reimagining of the popular series. Sadly, it's looking like it will be a one-off, because outside of its recently released DLC, Ubisoft has moved key members of the team over to other projects. Low sales are the reason for the decision, which is becoming all too common with cancellations within the industry these days.



Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Let the music play

I've been playing a bit of Sega Saturn recently and first cab off the rank was *Daytona USA*. It's a decent driving game, but that's not why I was keen to dust it off. I wanted to hear the absolutely insane soundtrack. I remembered it as being a combo of a Stock, Aitken and Waterman 12" dance remix and *The Krypton Factor* theme. I was not disappointed. The main song has been on a loop in my house for the past week, only being taken off to play *Rolling Start!*. This stuff is wild. By the way, I was digging around on the internet and found an incredible cover of the theme by Diff Rokka. Put this magazine down, go and have a listen and then come back. I'll wait… isn't it great?

It got me thinking about how important music is in a game. I've written before about my obsession for the music in *Sim* on the BBC. Repetitive as hell and catchier than anything The Beatles ever wrote. But what else? *WipEout* and *Crazy Taxi* are too obvious. There can't be anyone reading this that doesn't know the music and loves it. No one can hate the 'Ya, ya, ya, ya, ya!' Can they? I suppose there are some sick people out there, so anything is possible.

I was sat watching telly with my partner the other day, and for some unknown reason, the following words came out of my mouth –

"Kick, punch, it's all in the mind,
If you want to follow me, I'm sure you'll find,
The thing I'll teach ya are sure to beat ya,
Nevertheless you'll get a lesson from teacher now"

I have to be honest, I was disappointed by Katherine's subdued reaction. Borderline rude, to be honest. How the hell did I remember all those words? Because it's not just one of the best videogame tracks, it's one of the best songs of all time. The hours I spent playing that game just to make it to the next round to hear a new tune. It's one of only two games where I bought that actual CD soundtrack. The other one? *Space Channel 5*. That game also falls into the category of sexy videogame characters, which maybe I'll write about for the next issue and then burn before cleaning my eyes with industrial soap.

This is a short piece so I can only mention a few bits of music, a mere soupçon of what's available. I do think we were spoiled once games started being made on CD, and yes PlayStation I AM looking at you. Is it cheating to just bang classic rock tracks in a game? No, of course it isn't. That's the kind of thing a stupid old man would say. I do believe that the old way of cramming some music onto an 8-bit micro with just a few lines of code has to be celebrated. Those pioneers were geniuses. Right, this is done, I'm off to put the *Icarus* title screen on a loop.

> "Is it cheating to just bang classic rock tracks in a game? No, of course it isn't"

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Lost connections

Games aren't as tactile as they used to be. Yes, alright, despite the best efforts of console manufacturers – now mostly abandoned – to do away with joypads altogether, we do still have a physical interface with our games. And, yes, joypads do rumble and click and buzz, and they sit in our hands better than ever before. Even then, ergonomics have made it so that we barely even notice we're holding a controller.

As popular as the Wii was, I still preferred a traditional joypad set up to all that waving your hands around. And don't get me started on the Xbox Kinect. Using that thing was just… weird. Not having any sort of physical feedback when you threw a punch more often than not meant that I'd pull a muscle. I never knew how much force to use, so I'd generally use more than was necessary. I just wanted to feel something, man!

However, a lot of the time these days games don't even exist in a physical sense. Whether you stream them or download them, everything is kind of ephemeral to a greater or lesser extent. When I was a kid, everything about playing a game was hard. Alright, it's hard now in the sense that you can't just play a game anymore; you first have to spend several hours installing an update patch, but at least you can wander off and do something else while that's happening.

My first games machine was an Atari VCS. Chunky buttons on the machine itself, which gave a satisfying 'ka-clunk'. The carts were bulky, and needed to be kind of forced into the slot… it felt analogue and weirdly satisfying. Less so the controller, admittedly, which had all the ergonomics of a brick that was in late-stage rigor mortis.

And then when I got a ZX Spectrum, you'd have to contend with the tape machine chewing up your cassette. A pencil was a necessary accessory for any early Eighties gamer, in order to wind the tape back in. It took effort. We had to work for our games, kids, and it could all go wrong at any moment!

Jump forward to the SNES and Mega Drive, and a whole generation of gamers knew to blow into their games before playing them. Dust! Dust could prevent a game loading! Can today's youthful gamers even conceive of such a time? And heck – has there been any feature of gaming hardware more sexy than the eject button on the SNES, spitting out a cart with that lovely 'BONK'?

I mean, even as relatively recently as the original PlayStation you still had a deeply pleasing 'OPEN' control to pop the lid on the disk tray, exposing all the guts. You had to aim the disc just right or you risked scratching it. Nowadays, PS5 games are sort of… inhaled by a pair of soft, velvety, lips.

You can argue the drawbacks of all this, and the relative merits of modern gaming, but what I think the chunky, clunky, analogue-digital past gave us was a connection to our games that made them feel more tangible and somehow real. ✱

> "My first games machine was an Atari VCS. Chunky buttons on the machine itself, which gave a satisfying 'ka-clunk'"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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» Jamie Woodhouse is the creative behind the Amiga favourite *Qwak* and the popular *Retro Racing* series.

» [iOS] Snow-based tracks ramp up the difficulty, so make sure your cornering is up to scratch.

Retro Racing 2

Jamie Woodhouse talks us through the sequel to his popular iOS racer

One of our favourite iOS racing games was Jamie Woodhouse's excellent *Retro Racing*. The creator of the Team17 Amiga gem *Qwak* is now back with a brand-new sequel, so we were keen to find out how it happened, and why Jamie still likes working with iOS.

So what made you decide to work on a sequel to *Retro Racing*, Jamie?
It's a decision I made some time ago, not long after I finished the original *Retro Racing*, which did OK sales-wise. Part of me wanted more of that success, and also, I always felt there was room for improvement.

This is the third game you've released on iOS, what is it you like about it from a coding perspective?
I personally really enjoy working within the Apple ecosystem. I use my own framework and asset production tools (sprite grabber, atlas creation, map editor, etc) and have things in place to make development more streamlined. Everything is really zippy and fast, and my framework also acts as an abstraction layer between the bulk of my game's code, and whatever platform it's running on. The idea is that it's easier porting to other platforms.

> "It's just me working on it, which is definitely a challenge at times"
> **JAMIE WOODHOUSE**

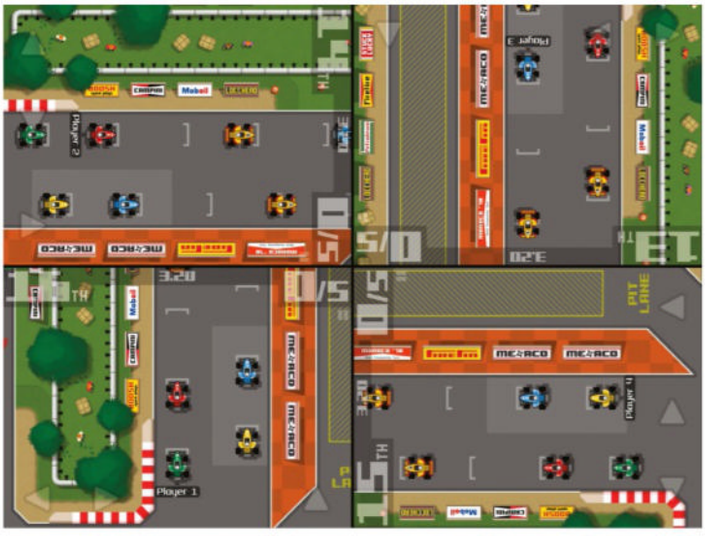
How difficult is it to make a racing game feel responsive using touch controls?
There is a lot of attention to small, almost imperceptible, details. It all helps create the vibe for a game. It's trivial having touch controls turn a car instantly, or drive it forward; but there's a little more subtlety to it than that. There is also feedback as your car interacts with the environment: wobble and bumps on curbs, performance differences on different terrains, particles of sand, oil, grass, snow, which stick to each individual tire and leave a trail, little splashes of water as you drive over it, camera shake when you hit things or collect a yellow Boost power-up, and much more. All of that is superimportant. It breathes life into the game and creates a sense that your car exists within the environment.

What gameplay improvements does *Retro Racing 2* offer over its predecessor?
New stuff includes: more detailed car liveries, more cars, more

» [iOS] Jostle accidentally (or intentionally) with another driver and they'll throw back an angry retort.

» [iOS] Jamie tells us, "My plan is to release *Retro Racing 2* next on Android, then a Steam version (Mac and Windows), and I'd love to get it on certain consles."

» Here's a look behind the scenes at the level editor Jamie used to create tracks for *Retro Racing 2*



» [iOS] It will be cramped, but you can get four people around an iPad for some multiplayer action.

varied track designs across different terrains (snow, sand, etc), damage and pit lane repair, bridges, improvements to the leaderboards displayed after each race, more visual eye-candy stuff, iPad 4-player Race Party, controller support, and of course, it's now in landscape mode!

How do you decide what power-ups you're going to put in the game?

I'm somewhat inspired by the arcade games I played as a kid, *Super Sprint* being one. I think the main three power-ups, Speed, Acceleration and Tires, are typical for this kind of game, and the yellow Boost power-up just seems fun. I'm also considering multiplayer-only power-ups, and ways for players to interact with and attack each other in Race Party mode. It needs some thought though.

Is *Retro Racing 2* a pure solo project or do you receive any help?

Yes, it's just me working on it, which is definitely a challenge at times. If I'm stuck on something, I normally reach out for help on social media; and find other indie game devs to be friendly, helpful and supportive. I sometimes get stuck on something technical and end up down a rabbit hole. I guess nine times out of ten, it's something someone else will have experience with and could resolve in no time; so having the right support network is crucial I think, for anyone working alone.

How long has the game taken to create and what are the biggest challenges you've encountered?

It's taken way too long. It really has. I must have been working on it (on and off) since the last one. I'm afraid to say how many years. It's been extremely frustrating at times. I've added stuff in, took stuff out, tinkered and tinkered. I've procrastinated. I've often felt it's not quite good enough. I've also sometimes felt it's the best thing since sliced bread. I've also, more recently, been quite anxious about releasing it. That said, I am super pleased I've actually released the game. It's like a weight has lifted and I'm filled with a sense of movement (in a creative sense). I'm really pleased and proud with how the game has turned out.

How challenging is it to get your games noticed on the AppStore?

Getting noticed is hard. Monetisation practices have changed too; and I'm not sure the kind of games I like to make are the kind of games that typically do well now on mobile. Fortunately, Apple decided to feature *Retro Racing 2*, which I'm sure helped a lot. Other than that, I've not done much in the way of marketing, other than my own DIY marketing on social media.

Can you tell us anything about what you're planning next? Will there be expansions or a new game?

I have a few ideas for what's next. One idea is a four-player *Qwak* spin-off. It's called *Qwak: Ducks In A Dungeon*. I can't say too much, and it's just the seeds of an idea for now, but I used to play *Gauntlet* quite a bit in the local arcades…

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

MAY 2008 – Spiky shells have got everyone blue, football fever has gripped the nation – well, the nations that qualified – and who's that rogue leader? That's gotta be Kane. Nick Thorpe is warming up the DeLorean for another look back at yesterday's news

» [PC] We don't need a '*Citizen Kane* of gaming' when we have Kane from *Command & Conquer.*

NEWS MAY 2008

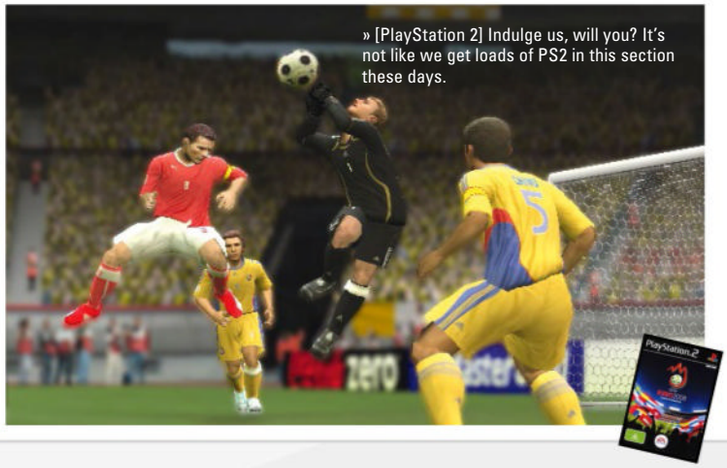
Dual natural disasters rocked Asia this month, with Cyclone Nargis making landfall in Myanmar on 2 May, killing over 138,000 people and causing over $12 billion worth of damage. Relief efforts were hampered by the 8.0 magnitude Sichuan earthquake in China on 12 May, which itself left over 90,000 people dead or missing and caused $150 billion of damage.

It was another successful year for Manchester United, as the team confirmed its tenth Premier League trophy on 11 May with a 2-0 victory over Wigan Athletic. Ten days later, the team claimed the European Cup after beating Chelsea on penalties following a 1-1 draw. On 17 May, Portsmouth won the FA Cup with a 1-0 victory over Cardiff City.

The final of the Eurovision Song Contest took place on 24 May in Belgrade, Serbia, with Russia's Dima Bilan winning with the song *Believe*. Andy Abraham represented the UK with his song *Even If*, delivering the country's second last-place finish at the contest. Terry Wogan, who had commentated on the events for the BBC since the Seventies, decried Russia as "political winners" and suggested that he may not return next year.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 2008

Has *Mario Kart* done the unthinkable and slipped from the podium positions? *Official Nintendo Magazine* got the exclusive review last month and gave it 94%, calling it "the best online Nintendo game ever", and *GamesMaster* gave it 91%. But what's this? *Edge* and *games™* both gave it 6/10, with the former complaining that changes to the drift boost "come at the cost of some skill", while the latter felt that "three blue shells on one lap might seem unlikely, but it happens often enough to be more than a trivial annoyance". Coming down the middle, *nRevolution* felt that "it's hard to see anyone getting particularly upset" by the controversial addition of motorbikes, but found the game "fairly graphically uninspiring" and agreed that "overuse of the cheaper power-ups" spoiled 150cc mode in single-player. The mag settled on a score of 8.0/10.



» [PlayStation 2] Indulge us, will you? It's not like we get loads of PS2 in this section these days.

The intriguing *Wii Fit* also showed up to underline the family friendly credentials of Nintendo's console this month, and it was well received. *ONM* conceded that it was "no substitute for a gym membership", but felt that it was "a lot cheaper, a lot more convenient and a lot more fun" and gave it 91%. For the sceptical, *nRevolution* noted that "Even if you're not particularly invested in getting healthier the Nintendo way, there are a number of entertaining minigames that are well worth playing," giving the game 8.5/10.

Of course, if you'd rather sit back and watch virtual people do all the simulated physical activity, you could just play *UEFA Euro 2008* – a mid-season *FIFA* update that went down well across platforms, earning 9/10 from *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*, 8/10 from both *games™* and *Official PlayStation Magazine*, 4/5 from *360*, 7/10 from both *X360* and *Official Xbox 360 Magazine*, and 62% from *Play*. In its review, *games™* claimed that passing "feels a

lot quicker" and first-time shots were "greatly improved", and felt that additions such as the Captain Your Country mode "offer up a whole new dynamic". *Play*'s complaints mainly related to the reduction in content compared to mainline *FIFA* games, asking, "Does 50 teams for the price of 570 sound like a good deal to you?"

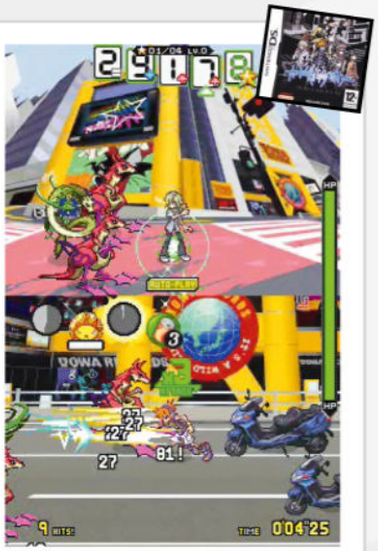
On the PC, the best thing of the month was an expansion pack, as Kane returned and he was exceptionally angry. *Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath* added a new story, new units and rebalanced strategy – the last point necessary, according to *PC Gamer*, because the base game "hasn't been taken seriously by some RTS fan-camps, and Kane's Wrath tries to fix that". *Total PC Gaming* praised the new Global Conquest mode, which added a turn-based element to the real-time strategy. *PC Gamer* settled on a score of 77% and *Total PC Gaming* gave it 8/10.

DS owners had a couple of delightful options to choose from, starting with *The World Ends With You*, an RPG set in Tokyo's youth district Shibuya. The game earned 8/10 from *Edge*, which said that "the game is stuffed with cutscenes and extended dialogue but when control is wrested from the narrative, the action mechanics are deep and interesting". *ONM* was also impressed, stating that "the story is fantastic, the character design is stunning" and "it sounds better than almost any DS game we've played" with only minor battle system complaints dragging the game down. That still left it with an impressive 88% score.

The other great option was *Bangai-O Spirits*, a sequel to Treasure's outstanding N64/Dreamcast multi-directional shooter. In a 9/10 review, *games™* claimed that it "retains the eye-smacking pyrotechnics" of its predecessor but ditches plot and structure for "shoot-'em-up construction kit qualities" and noted that the pre-built stages are "replete with in-jokes and inspired references". The game scored 9.3/10 in *nRevolution*, which praised the ability to share your created levels as sound files, and felt that it was, "A daring and ambitious shmup, reminding us of our reasons for falling in love with the genre in the first place."

Lastly, if you're looking for highlights on the HD consoles this month, you sadly won't find any – save for an 8/10 import review of "*Yakuza 3*" in *OPM*. The game reviewed was actually the historical spin-off *Ryu Ga Gotoku Kenzan*, which has never been localised.

Next month, your cousin Roman wants to go bowling with you. Aren't you going to answer his call? ✱



» [DS] *The World Ends With You* really is stylish. If you missed it, it's on Switch now.

» [Wii] We never got on with the bikes, but then we're traditionalists like that.

» [Wii] Little Billy didn't burn enough calories, and now he has to walk the tightrope as a punishment.

CHARTS

MAY 2008

XBOX 360

1 – **Army Of Two** (EA)
2 – **Bully: Scholarship Edition** (Rockstar)
3 – **Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare** (Activision)
4 – **Frontlines: Fuel Of War** (THQ)
5 – **Lost Odyssey** (Microsoft)

WII

1 – **Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games** (Sega)
2 – **Carnival: Funfair Games** (2K Games)
3 – **Game Party** (Midway)
4 – **No More Heroes** (Rising Star)
5 – **Bully: Scholarship Edition** (Rockstar)

PSP

1 – **FIFA 08** (EA)
2 – **The Simpsons Game** (EA)
3 – **Need For Speed ProStreet** (EA)
4 – **WWE Smackdown vs Raw 2008** (THQ)
5 – **Patapon** (Sony)

MUSIC

1 – **That's Not My Name** (The Ting Tings)
2 – **Take A Bow** (Rihanna)
3 – **4 Minutes** (Madonna feat. Justin Timberlake)
4 – **Heartbreaker** (Will I Am feat. Cheryl Cole)
5 – **Wearing My Rolex** (Wiley)

THIS MONTH IN...

games™

Japan columnist Tim Rogers is rather taken with Treasure's latest game too. "It's whatever you want it to be, and it's gorgeous," he says. "*Bangai-O Spirits* is a game that people will still be plumbing in a decade. It's *Brain Training* for God."

Official PlayStation 2 Magazine

Does the ageing console have one last classic in it? "*Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 4* will be released in Japan on 10 July, exclusively on PS2," says the mag, which says it's "Tipped to be the hottest role-player this year."

nRevolution

"Finally a title has been released that is exclusive to Nintendo and feels different to anything else out there," writes a reader who loves *No More Heroes*, prompting the mag to question why its sales are so slow. "Are you guys sharing the same copy?"

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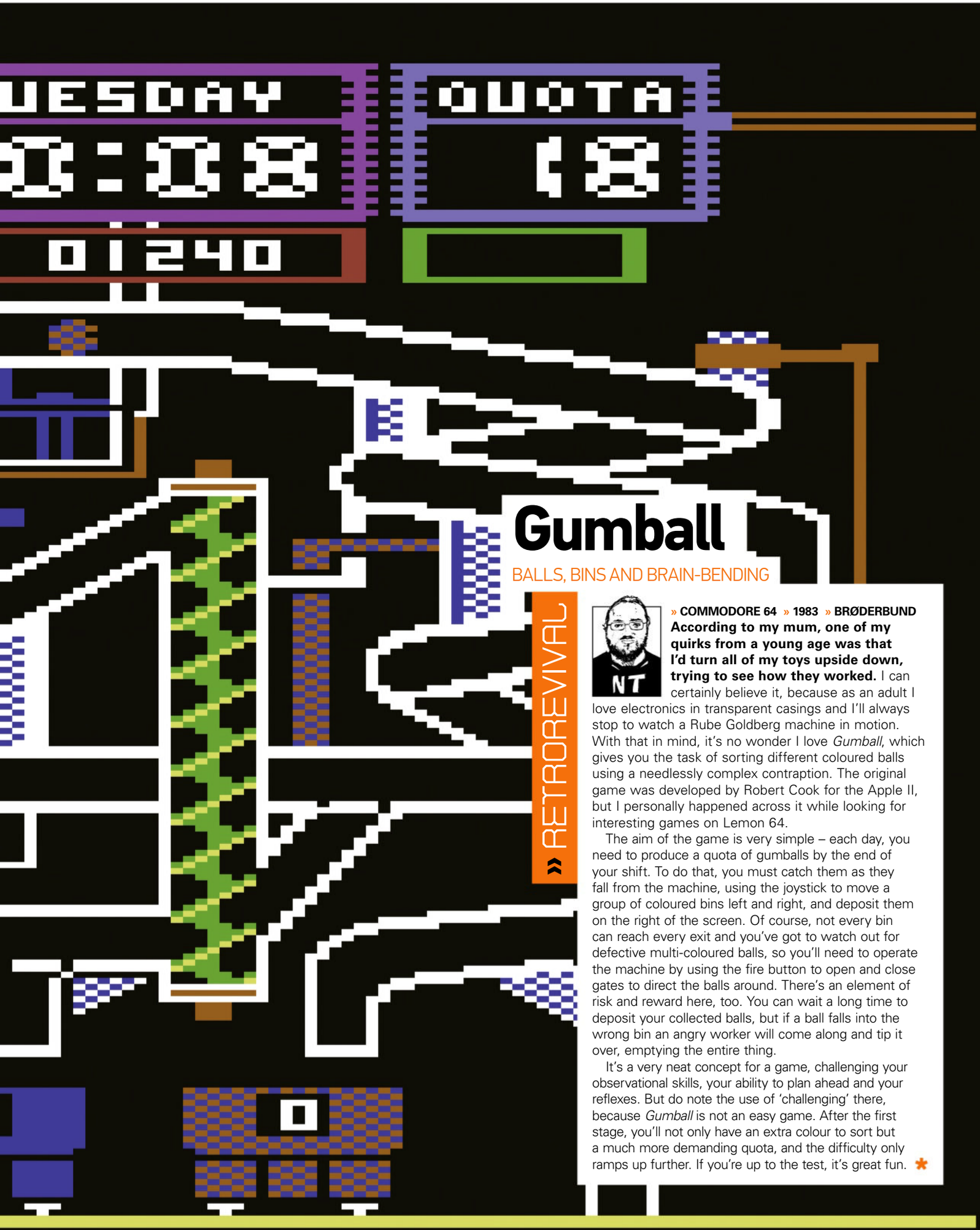


Gumball

BALLS, BINS AND BRAIN-BENDING

» RETROREVIVAL

» COMMODORE 64 » 1983 » BRØDERBUND

According to my mum, one of my quirks from a young age was that I'd turn all of my toys upside down, trying to see how they worked. I can certainly believe it, because as an adult I love electronics in transparent casings and I'll always stop to watch a Rube Goldberg machine in motion. With that in mind, it's no wonder I love *Gumball*, which gives you the task of sorting different coloured balls using a needlessly complex contraption. The original game was developed by Robert Cook for the Apple II, but I personally happened across it while looking for interesting games on Lemon 64.

The aim of the game is very simple – each day, you need to produce a quota of gumballs by the end of your shift. To do that, you must catch them as they fall from the machine, using the joystick to move a group of coloured bins left and right, and deposit them on the right of the screen. Of course, not every bin can reach every exit and you've got to watch out for defective multi-coloured balls, so you'll need to operate the machine by using the fire button to open and close gates to direct the balls around. There's an element of risk and reward here, too. You can wait a long time to deposit your collected balls, but if a ball falls into the wrong bin an angry worker will come along and tip it over, emptying the entire thing.

It's a very neat concept for a game, challenging your observational skills, your ability to plan ahead and your reflexes. But do note the use of 'challenging' there, because *Gumball* is not an easy game. After the first stage, you'll not only have an extra colour to sort but a much more demanding quota, and the difficulty only ramps up further. If you're up to the test, it's great fun. ✱

TEKKEN

THE UNDISPUTED KING

THIRTY YEARS AFTER ARCADE GAMERS FIRST GOT TO GRIPS WITH KAZUYA AND COMPANY, TEKKEN IS THE UNDISPUTED CHAMPION OF THE 3D FIGHTING GENRE. WE SPEAK TO KATSUHIRO HARADA AND MICHAEL MURRAY TO FIND OUT WHY THIS FIERCE FIGHTING SERIES HAS ENDURANCE LIKE NO OTHER

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

In the mid-Nineties, the arcade industry was in the middle of two gold-rush moments. The first had started with the introduction of *Street Fighter II* in 1991, sparking a boom in competitive fighting games that showed no signs of subsiding. The second was a hardware arms race between Sega and Namco, as the old rivals sought to outdo one another in the emerging market for polygonal 3D games. Sega was the first to combine the two trends in 1993 with *Virtua Fighter* – a smash hit with players in Japanese arcades, and a game that sold Saturn hardware when it came home.

Namco returned fire the next year with *Tekken*, one of very few games that had both the looks and the gameplay to challenge the pioneer. In fact, *Tekken* did more than simply challenge Sega's game – thanks to its broader international appeal and its home ports to the popular PlayStation hardware, it soon eclipsed not only the *Virtua Fighter* series, but every other 3D fighting game available. The likes of *Dead Or Alive*, *Fighting Vipers*, *Bloody Roar*, even Namco's own *Soul Edge* came along, but none of them could dethrone *Tekken*.

And then, one by one, the challengers stopped coming. It's been over five years since the last *Dead Or Alive* game, and even longer since *Soulcalibur VI* released. *Virtua Fighter 5: Ultimate Showdown* is a great game, but it's hardly new. *Street Fighter*, *Mortal Kombat* and *The King Of Fighters* are still around, but while all of them flirted with the third dimension in the past, they have long since retreated to the comfort zone from which they came – that of 2D game design. If you want a 3D fighting game these days, it's *Tekken* or bust.

It's not a situation that Katsuhiro Harada, chief producer of the *Tekken* series, takes any delight in. "It's quite unfortunate, actually, that *Tekken* is one of the only 3D fighting games that is still being played actively by the fans," he tells us. But it is true, and there has to be a reason for *Tekken*'s success. "Harada himself, he's been on the franchise for 30 years, and myself for 20-some as well," says Michael Murray, a producer on the *Tekken* series. "You know, most of the people have been there for just as long, so it's quite unique compared to other companies, we think," he offers.

That creative continuity certainly explains why *Tekken* has enjoyed so few notable missteps over the years – sure, there are consensus high points such as *Tekken 3*, *5* and *8*, but the remarkable level of consistency means that even less-celebrated entries like *Tekken 4* are never less than good, and are arguably more interesting for their differences. So join us for a look at the fundamental factors that have kept *Tekken* fighting fit for a remarkable three decades, and seem set to maintain the series' popularity for many years to come.

KATSUHIRO HARADA
■ *Tekken* series chief producer, Bandai Namco.

MICHAEL MURRAY
■ *Tekken* series producer, Bandai Namco.

» [PlayStation 5] *Tekken 8* boasts an extraordinary level of graphical detail, while maintaining smooth performance.

POWERFUL PRESENTATION

SPECTACLE AND SONIC DELIGHTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TEKKEN'S STOCK IN TRADE

It's fair to say that, no matter whether the context is mid-Nineties arcades or the latest consoles, *Tekken* is and always has been at the forefront of presentation in 3D fighting games, not least graphically. "I believe it really set *Tekken* apart. Back in the day when you bought some kind of new platform, fighting games were a benchmark of what was possible on that console," says Harada. "Especially when looking at fighting games, where you have one-on-one matches, you're able to focus really on the portrayal of those humanoid models and how they act, and the level of detail."

What's fascinating is that the original *Tekken* was originally intended to run on Namco's cutting-edge System 22 arcade hardware to compete directly with Sega's *Virtua Fighter 2*, but instead became the first game to utilise the less expensive System 11 board, which was based on the PlayStation hardware. In 1995, Namco's Shigeichi Nakamura told *Edge*, "We've left the big arcade stores to Sega and *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Tekken* has been sold to smaller arcade centres." *Tekken* couldn't match its rival's 3D backgrounds, settling for scaling 2D planes instead, nor could it equal the polygon count of its fighters. What Namco did achieve was the creation of combatants that were equally captivating in their movements and distinctive in their design, and a game that ran at an impressive 60fps.

The choice to use PlayStation-based hardware in the arcade meant that the console version looked equally good – "like no other game on a home system" in *Edge*'s view. The additional space afforded by the CD-ROM allowed for a new introduction video and ending FMV sequences. "We really had some amazing artists at the time, and they were participating in worldwide competitions like SIGGRAPH," says Harada, remembering those pre-rendered scenes. The CD-ROM also allowed for new arrangements of Yoshie Takayanagi and Yoshie Arakawa's original arcade soundtrack, marking the first involvement of prolific series composers Nobuyoshi Sano and Shinji Hosoe.

Tekken 2 pushed things further by adding a lighting system, which really added atmosphere to Lei's rooftop stage and King's church. *Tekken 3* saw the series move to the System 12 arcade hardware, an enhanced board that allowed the series to display full 3D backgrounds for the first time – a feat that the humble PlayStation couldn't replicate. However, an improvement that did make it to the home was the new approach to character models – whereas the first two games had assembled characters from distinctly

» [PlayStation 2] *Tekken Tag Tournament* was an early indication of what Sony's new hardware could offer the series.

» [PlayStation] We don't skip the FMV intro to *Tekken 2* – it's too cool for us to want to.

» [PlayStation 2] Paul slams Asuka into the concrete floor, causing bits of rubble to go flying on impact.

» [Arcade] Neat little presentational touches like special camera angles for throws set *Tekken* apart from the crowd.

modelled parts such as limbs, torsos and heads, *Tekken 3*'s characters had their arms and legs attached. Namco's confidence in animating tricky fighting styles was also growing, as Hajime Nakatani told *CVG* in 1998, "The motion capture of capoeira, the Brazilian martial art, that idea was also considered for *Tekken 2*, but wasn't realised. So we wanted to put this into *Tekken 3*."

In the arcades, *Tekken Tag Tournament* also used System 12 and looked similar to *Tekken 3*, but Namco saw the home conversion as an ideal project for getting to grips with the PlayStation 2. The result was a huge jump in graphical quality, and Namco's PS2-based System 246 arcade board hosted the next two arcade *Tekken* games, bringing parity between console and arcade once more. The ability to render more realistic environments not only informed the gameplay direction of *Tekken 4*, but led to new special effects like water, lens flares and floors cracking upon impact. PlayStation 3-based boards were used for *Tekken 6* and *Tekken Tag Tournament 2*, too, so *Tekken 7* was an oddity in its use of a custom PC-based arcade board.

Tekken 8 has continued to push graphical boundaries, with development solely focussed on the latest console and PC hardware – and for Harada, there are clear benefits to that. "With the bump in resolution, it's much easier for people to see not only fine detailed hit effects, but how much like depth it has in the foreground, etc," he says. "In addition to that, there's even the animation like which way the character is when they're blocking a certain attack, and how that affects the feedback that the players get on what state they're in in the game," he adds, bringing it all back to the service of the fighting.

POCKET POWER

TEKKEN CAN IMPRESS EVEN WITHOUT THE MOST POWERFUL HARDWARE

» [Game Boy Advance] Getting two background layers and a scaling, rotating layer required expert programming.

Although *Tekken* is a series that has always pushed home-console hardware pretty hard, the series has served surprisingly well as a showcase for portable platforms when given the opportunity. This was first demonstrated with the first *Tekken* to come to a Nintendo console, *Tekken Advance* on the humble Game Boy Advance. While its pre-rendered sprites went a long way towards helping, it was some Mode 7-style trickery that allowed the system to get surprisingly close to the look of the original PlayStation *Tekken*.

As good as *Tekken Advance* looked, *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* on the PSP was a whole world apart, managing an excellent approximation of the PS2-powered arcade game. The models and stages were highly detailed, the framerate was rock solid and you'd have had to be pretty curmudgeonly to complain about it. Even more remarkable was the conversion of *Tekken 6* – a greater stretch admittedly, since the original game was designed for PS3 hardware, but a creditable effort all the same.

Tekken 6 was again adapted for handheld as *Tekken 3D: Prime Edition* in 2012, for the Nintendo 3DS. While critics complained of a lack of single-player longevity and rough performance in online play, the game's technical performance was a real treat – not only did it look great, but it held its 60fps performance even with the system's stereoscopic 3D turned on.

» [PSP] *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* felt like it shouldn't have been possible on a handheld console in 2006.

TELLING TALES

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, TEKKEN'S STORY HAS SET IT APART FROM THE FIGHTING FIELD

It's a tale involving an extensive family in a constant state of feud, with plenty of fighting and occasional miraculous returns from seemingly fatal incidents – and while we could easily be talking about the Mitchell clan in *EastEnders*, it's *Tekken*'s Mishima bloodline that we're actually referring to. Honestly, the series is such a soap opera that it's a wonder we haven't seen the Queen Vic as a special arena. Then again, maybe giving Phil Mitchell the Devil Gene would spice up Walford a bit.

Although the *Tekken* series has a cast of dozens, the central plot has always revolved around the squabbles of the Mishima family. Heihachi Mishima is a ruthless, cunning businessman who controls the Mishima Zaibatsu, an incredibly powerful corporation with its own private army. When his son Kazuya was just five years old, he threw him off a cliff to see if he was strong enough to get back up, setting up a father-son power struggle for the ages. Jin Kazama, introduced in *Tekken 3* as the son of Kazuya and Jun Kazama, has inherited his father's Devil Gene and seeks to destroy the Mishima family to end the chaos it has caused – chaos that goes well beyond dirty business and into the realm of global warfare.

While competitive play drove *Tekken*'s popularity in the arcade, it's this ongoing story that has been the key to the single-player longevity of the series at home. The PlayStation port of the first game gave each main fighter their own FMV ending scene, not only giving *Tekken* a distinguishing feature over the likes of *Virtua Fighter* and *Battle Arena Toshinden*, but encouraging players to beat the game with multiple characters to see how things turned out for them. The second game added endings for unlockable characters too, and started to show the endless escalation of the Mishima family's attempts to kill one another – as Kazuya's ending in *Tekken* had shown him gaining revenge by dropping Heihachi off a cliff, so Heihachi's ending in *Tekken 2* shows him dropping his son into an active volcano. By *Tekken 3*, inter-character relationships were sufficiently convoluted to require a relationship chart in the Japanese packaging.

The plot began to take an increased prominence from *Tekken 4*, with a prologue shown for each character's story, and *Tekken 5* added pre-fight and post-fight cutscenes for fights against specific rival characters. However, *Tekken 6* radically changed the way the story was told – instead of picking a character and following their path through one-on-one fights, Scenario Campaign had players follow a single main plot starring newcomer Lars, through a Tekken Force-style beat-'em-up. *Tekken 7*'s The Mishima Saga story switched things to mainly one-on-one fights, with occasional deviations, and your playable character would be chosen according to the story requirements. *Tekken 8*'s main story The

» [PlayStation 5] The Devil Gene carried by Kazuya, Jin and others is a key plot device throughout the series.

» [PlayStation] Some characters don't have super-serious stories, as Xiaoyu's *Tekken 3* ending shows.

Dark Awakens and its DLC story Unforgotten Echoes both adopt the same structure, though without the framing device of a journalist's investigation this time around.

With the increasing prominence of the storyline aspect of *Tekken*, we had to know if characters are now included or omitted based on their importance to a game's plot. "The base has always been how the characters play and the concept of the characters themselves," Harada replies. "So that's always come first, [thinking] about what makes this character unique, what people like about their appearance, what is the unique hook in the gameplay that they fulfil when compared to other characters. And then after that, we think about the story and what kind of role that character should play in the background of the story, but it's always the play style first."

This works partially because the cast of supporting characters is so large that plenty are typically deployed in comic-relief roles. However, it's also true that unlike many fighting games where the heroes are always heroic, *Tekken*'s characters don't have a fixed moral alignment. Heihachi, Kazuya and Jin have all served as both protagonists and antagonists over the years, and that flexibility extends to their allies and enemies – power corrupts, and it's hard to stay righteous when you're in a contest to determine the most powerful. That factor allows for *Tekken* to maintain a sense of intrigue that can be hard to find in series with more rigidly defined characters.

» [PlayStation] *Tekken*'s resident Robin Hood, Yoshimitsu, scatters his winnings in a poor district.

FIGHTING ON FILM

TEKKEN FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO KEEP THEIR OWN FISTS CLEAN

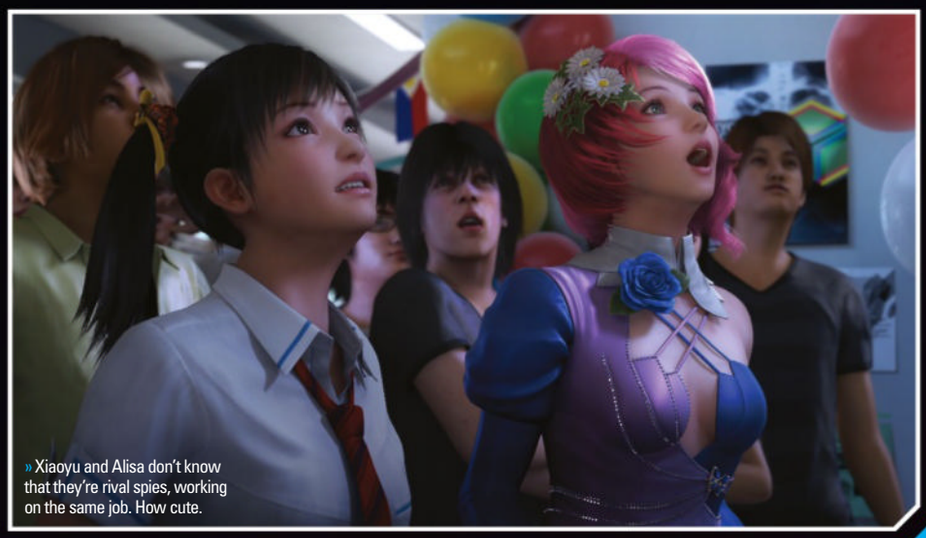
It's no surprise that a series that has cultivated a cast and story like *Tekken*'s would end up as a prime target for film and TV adaptations, and indeed *Tekken* has been taken beyond the videogame realm a number of times. The first such adaptation was *Tekken: The Motion Picture*, a two-part anime that went straight to video in Japan in 1998, before being edited into a single film for international release. It takes the plot of the first game and incorporates a variety of additional characters from the second and third games.

The next adaptation was a live-action effort simply titled *Tekken*, in which Jin (Jon Foo) seeks to confront Kazuya (Ian Anthony Dale) and Heihachi (Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa) over his mother's death, with Christie (Kelly Overton) and Steve (Luke Goss) as allies. The film was poorly received in its Japanese theatrical release and went straight to DVD elsewhere, and Harada has disavowed it as "terrible". *Tekken 2: Kazuya's Revenge* also went straight to DVD in 2014, with Tagawa reprising his role as Heihachi and Kane Kosugi now playing Kazuya. In this bizarre prequel, Kazuya spends much of the movie battling with amnesia – a condition doubtless envied by anyone who chose to watch it.

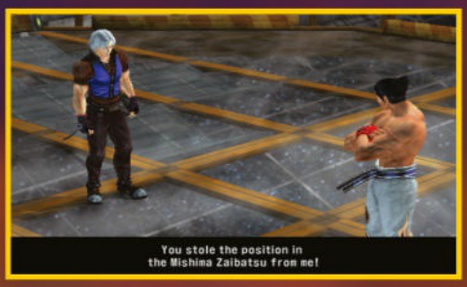
» Hwoarang tries to kick Jin's head off in *Tekken: Bloodline*. Do you think he succeeds?

The more recent animated adaptations of *Tekken* have been closer to the games. *Tekken: Blood Vengeance* is a CG animated movie released in 2011, in which G Corporation and the Mishima Zaibatsu send Ling Xiaoyu and Alisa Bosconovitch respectively into a school as spies, to gather intelligence on student Shin Kamiya. Although the plot was uneven, the faithful depictions of the characters and strong fight scenes made this one of the better adaptations.

A six-part anime series called *Tekken: Bloodline* arrived on Netflix in 2022, and adapted the story of *Tekken 3*, placing more emphasis on Jin's coming of age story. The story was praised for being accurate to the games, but the show was criticised for lacking focus on popular fighters and in particular for being too serious in tone.



» Xiaoyu and Alisa don't know that they're rival spies, working on the same job. How cute.



» [PlayStation 2] As Heihachi's adopted son and Kazuya's rival, Lee Chaolan is another key player in the Mishima family drama.

» [Xbox 360] Lars Alexandersson is the main protagonist of *Tekken 6* and one of Heihachi's many illegitimate children.

» [Arcade] A good character design is recognisable in silhouette form, and Heihachi's twin hair spikes fit the bill.

COLOURFUL COMBATANTS

FINELY TUNED FIGHTERS ARE ONE OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF TEKKEN'S ONGOING SUCCESS

It can be hard to create a distinctive fighting game cast – just ask Data East, which drew the legal ire of Capcom when *Fighters History*'s character designs were deemed too close to those of *Street Fighter II*. However, Namco created a memorable bunch for *Tekken*, and has been reaping the rewards ever since – most notably Heihachi Mishima and his various angular-haired progeny, but also characters like Yoshimitsu, the armour-clad ninja who takes on increasingly bizarre appearances as the series progresses.

That's not to say that *Tekken* is above a bit of homage, mind. Marshall Law and Lei Wulong are quite obviously inspired by Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan respectively, and if King and his leopard mask weren't designed with the Tiger Mask wrestling gimmick in mind, we'll happily take a backbreaker. It also wasn't above a little padding in the early days, with sub-bosses like Kunimitsu and Armor King whose moves were clearly patterned after their immediately playable counterparts. They were unlocked on a timer system in the arcades and served as rewards for beating the game at home, but Namco decided against pursuing that route any further after *Tekken 2*.

Speaking to *CVG* in 1998, *Tekken 3* producer Hajime Nakatani said, "In *Tekken 2* [arcade version] you can see how many times players choose characters, and we found that the sub-bosses were not really much used by players, which means they're not really so popular and not appealing to the user," by way of explanation. "So we decided to increase the number of moves which each character can perform. Therefore we decided to reduce the characters which were not used by the players."

That's not to say that the characters were all killed off of course, it just meant that the likes of Anna Williams had to play differently to her sister Nina to justify her inclusion. It didn't always work out that way – capoeira fighter Eddy Gordo ended up as an alternate skin for Christie Monteiro after she replaced him in *Tekken 4* – but for the most part, distinct characters tended to represent distinct martial arts, of which *Tekken* now features a wide variety from the likes of karate and taekwondo to boxing and sambo.

One thing that *Tekken* was quick to do, which has served it well in the long run, is to embrace funny and quirky characters as a core part of the series. The animal characters started the trend, like Heihachi's bear Kuma and the surprisingly powerful pairing of Roger and Alex, a kangaroo and lizard duo that share moves. Then you've got the likes of Eddy's alter-ego Tiger, Alisa Bosconovitch with her chainsaw arms and detachable head, and the pop idol Lucky Chloe with her cat ears and paws. Even Paul Phoenix and Marshall Law have become a reliable comedy double act over the years.

These days, the massive cast is something that the *Tekken* team is conscious of managing. "For *Tekken 8* we started off with quite a few characters compared to other competitors in the same genre. But also, each of these characters have a bunch of new moves, and have overall a whole lot more techniques than other fighting games.

» [Arcade] Eddy Gordo probably increased worldwide awareness of capoeira, but at what cost?

» [Arcade] Roger might be a novelty character, but don't be fooled – he packs a mean punch.

So from a sheer volume perspective, *Tekken* really stands out," says Harada. "Even if somehow we were able to make even more characters for launch, it wouldn't make sense either, because then it's just too much. It's a lot of choices for you to pick, but it's also a lot of choices for your opponent to pick, so it means that you have to really study even more to be able to effectively beat a variety of different characters," he adds.

To Harada, one of the benefits of the modern shift to downloadable content as a way of updating fighting games is the ability to avoid overwhelming players. "Gradually adding through DLC helps ease people into that, but at the same time, it lets us keep our team of core developers on the game post launch, so that not only can we add these characters, but we can also make additions to the game for features or change certain things, depending on what the community is asking for," he explains. "So it's more of a business model that allows us to do these things, rather than intentionally holding someone back so that we can put them on at a certain time."

» [Arcade] Squabbling sisters Nina and Anna have steadily grown less similar as time has passed.

» [Arcade] We weren't joking about Alisa's head coming off, by the way. It's fine though, she's a robot.

THE GUEST LIST

HOW DO YOU GET A COVETED INVITE TO THE KING OF IRON FIST TOURNAMENT?

Tekken characters have been known to show up all over the place, from cameos in games like *Xevious 3D/G* and the *Soulcalibur* series to participation in full-blown crossover efforts like *Project X Zone* and *Street Fighter X Tekken*. However, historically it wasn't exactly a two-way street – after the little dinosaur Gon leapt from the pages of his manga to the PlayStation version of *Tekken 3*, the bouncers got strict and *Tekken* was closed to guests.

However, *Tekken 7* really opened the floodgates. Akuma made the jump from the *Street Fighter* series, carrying across signature mechanics from that series as he did, and Geese Howard came across from SNK's *Fatal Fury* series. As additions from other fighting game series, these were welcome additions, but not nearly as surprising as *Final Fantasy XV*'s protagonist Noctis Lucis Caelum dropping in for a scrap – nor Negan Smith from *The Walking Dead*, the only character not to originate from a videogame.

No guest characters have yet been revealed for *Tekken 8*, though fans have shouted particularly loudly for *Yakuza*'s Kazuma Kiryu and Tifa Lockhart from *Final Fantasy VII*. What Harada did tell us was the kind of guest characters the team prefers to include. "A lot of times it's stuff we're interested in, but if we had to pick a theme that's general to the selection of the guest characters, one would be that there's a certain dark side to them that seems to match with *Tekken*," he says. Between Akuma, Geese and Negan, we can see it.

» [PlayStation] The little dinosaur was *Tekken*'s first guest star, but his time has obviously been and Gon. [Bad Nick - Ed]

» [PC] If we were picking a guy with a barbed-wire baseball bat, it would have been Cactus Jack.

MASTERFUL MECHANICS

CAREFULLY CRAFTED GAMEPLAY HAS ENSURED THAT TEKKEN IS ALWAYS COMPETITIVE

It may seem crazy if you've never considered it, but gameplay was a secondary concern in the early days of *Tekken*. Long-term readers may remember that back in 2014, Harada told us, "*Tekken* was a project to develop technology for use in 3D character animation, rather than as a 3D fighting game." It's true that *Tekken* certainly feels a little stiffer than its successors these days, but if you were there to experience it in the mid-Nineties, you know that it was a cut above what the majority of other developers were doing in 3D fighting games.

Key to *Tekken*'s success was an intuitive four-button control system, assigning one limb to each button. Speaking to *CVG* in 1998, Hajime Nakatani explained that, "In other games, sometimes players can win by just tapping one single button. We didn't want to make it that easy. So to perform a left-right punch combination, you need to press left punch, then right punch. We wanted to make a more technical game." An early distinguishing feature was each character's ten-hit combo, but the real signature of the series is the air combo – or juggle, if you like. The idea is to use a move that launches your opponent into the air, leaving them unable to block as you hit them for guaranteed damage on the way down.

Tekken 3 changed things up in a subtle but significant way by adding sidesteps, giving players more of an opportunity to take advantage of the 3D space. In that 1998 *CVG* interview, Nakatani explained that the *Tekken 3* development team's goal "was to make this game overall more fun than *Tekken 2*, and take more time than in *Tekken 2* over the balance of characters and overall gameplay". Indeed, Harada remembered things similarly in 2014, saying, "We reworked the game drastically around *Tekken 3* to make it more of a proper 3D fighting game." The feedback needed to transform the series was something that Namco relied on the coin-op crowd for, travelling to arcades to gather opinions.

"Back in the day, we could release in the arcade first, and then for about two years we were able to continually polish the competitive versus fighting of the game," says Harada, in the present day. "Even the opinions, and the playerbase that we got those opinions from, was quite different – they're there to play against other people for one, but also they're paying ¥100 per play and they're focussed solely on that particular mode. It's not like the story or any other stuff, so their opinions are a lot different than the current players that have everything at once," he continues, contrasting the arcade era with today's console-first ethos. "It was a high level of purity, I guess you could say, because they were just focussing on the game system itself and the characters. And so it was a lot easier to then get that part of the game in a good state, before we move it to the console and add the other features."

» [Wii U] We can't forget tag mechanics, but doubles matches are really reserved for special occasions.

» [PlayStation 5] Modes like Arcade Quest in *Tekken 8* are there to catch newcomers up with the game's mechanics.

Tekken 4 offered the first visually obvious change to the *Tekken* formula, abandoning the infinite flat stages of its predecessors in favour of more realistic arenas, confined spaces with walls, sloping surfaces and breakable obstacles like phone booths. The game wasn't well received, and while *Tekken 5* kept walled arenas, it also did away with sloping surfaces, toned down the effectiveness of wall combos and improved air combos. Taking a leaf out of the *Dead Or Alive* playbook, *Tekken 6* introduced breakable walls and floors that reveal extended fighting areas. Speaking of floors, it also added the Bound system, which allowed players to smash a mid-air foe into the ground and continue their combo. Following the trend for comeback mechanics, *Tekken 6* also introduced Rage, a state in which characters with low health deal extra damage.

Tekken 7 developed on the Rage concept by introducing Rage Art and Rage Drive moves, powerful attacks that require you to sacrifice your Rage state. The game also introduced new Power Crush moves, which allow a fighter to absorb an incoming attack in the process of delivering their own in a similar fashion to *Street Fighter IV*'s Focus Attack. Most recently, *Tekken 8* has introduced the Heat gauge, which gives a time-limited boost to certain moves and properties when activated, as well as enabling the aggressive Heat Dash and Heat Smash moves. The new air combo extender this time around is the Tornado, which sees opponents spun around and launched higher in mid-air.

» [PlayStation 5] Rage Art moves are given spectacular camera work befitting their dramatic effect on matches.

» [PlayStation 2] *Tekken 4*'s changes were unpopular at the time, but have been viewed more favourably in recent years.

» [PlayStation] Don't let your opponent fall – hit them again on the way down for an air combo.

A DUELIST'S DISTRACTIONS

TEKKEN HAS ALWAYS INCLUDED SPECIAL EXTRA MODES FOR HOME PLAYERS – HERE ARE SOME OF THE BEST

GALAGA

Just as the PlayStation conversion of *Ridge Racer* had included *Galaxian* as a loading screen game, so *Tekken*'s PlayStation port has its sequel. It's not just a fun diversion, though – if you can manage to hit every enemy, you'll unlock Kazuya's third costume, the purple devil gear.

TEKKEN FORCE

First introduced in *Tekken 3*, this mode is a short scrolling beat-'em-up that has you beating up the Mishima Zaibatsu's goons. Beat it and you'll unlock Dr Bosconovitch. This concept was later expanded on in *Tekken 5*'s The Devil Within mode and the Scenario Campaign in *Tekken 6*.

TEKKEN BOWL

Tekken Tag Tournament gave us this particular oddity. It's exactly what you'd expect – adjust your fighter's position, get the spin right, set the power and hope for a strike. It returned in *Tekken: Dark Resurrection* and as DLC in *Tekken 7*, and even found its way to mobile platforms as a stand-alone game.

TEKKEN BALL

Originating in *Tekken 3* and most recently spotted in *Tekken 8* where it's playable online, Tekken Ball pits two fighters against each other in a bizarre volleyball-style contest. Whack the ball to charge up some damage and send it over – if your opponent fails to respond properly, they'll take some damage.

» French player Norman 'GEN1US' Chatrier battles it out in a *Tekken 6* tournament he'd eventually win.

COMMUNITY AND COMPETITION

MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, IT'S TEKKEN PLAYERS THAT KEEP TEKKEN ALIVE

***Tekken* has always been an exciting game to play, and it's often a thrill to watch too.** With that in mind, it's no surprise that competitive play has been a part of *Tekken* since the early days of the series. It has come a long way, too – while there's no denying that *GamesMaster*'s showcase of competitive *Tekken 3* was worth shouting about in the Nineties, today's top players can enjoy sponsorship deals and fans have access to a wealth of live-streamed events that make it easy to watch the top players in action.

Records on early *Tekken* tournaments are spotty at best, but we know that the scene had produced notable players such as the UK's Ryan Hart by the late-Nineties. The series became a mainstay at the Evolution Championship Series in the early Noughties, when players such as Qudans, Jackie Tran, JinKid and Crow emerged as dominant forces. *Tekken 6* was played in events such as the Major League Gaming Pro Circuit and World Cyber Games as well as events like Evo, and Korean players like Nin and Knee gained worldwide recognition during this era, as well as JDCR when *Tekken Tag Tournament 2* arrived. In more recent years with *Tekken 7* and *Tekken 8*, players from Pakistan such as Arslan Ash and Atif Butt have achieved fame.

Since Harada and the *Tekken* team would solicit feedback directly from players in the arcade scene, it's no surprise that the developers have a hand in how the community has developed over the years. "We've been in charge of building that scene for many years on our side, and it was about not trying to take over and make our own official tournament series, but to find a good way, an effective way, to include the community," Harada tells us. "So for example, on the Tekken World Tour, the community have kind of gathered themselves. One person might decide to do a tournament and they try to get more players – say they get 64 players, then they get a certain amount of points, but if they get 96 players, they get even more points. I think it's a good kind of hybrid way of doing it, where the community is a part of our series, rather than us just having a closed off tournament series run by our company, like some of the competitors probably do."

The increasing popularity of professional gaming has resulted in an increase in opportunities for players too, as Harada notes. "Esports is this word that's really become popular, and it's been able to attract a lot more outside sponsors, which as a result has brought about cool things where some companies other than ours decide that maybe they're going to bring some famous players from Korea to a local event and fight against the local players," he explains. "Things like this are happening a lot more often." While esports isn't a term that all of the fighting game community has embraced, it's hard to deny that the attention has been transformative – some of the prize pools for tournaments would have been truly unimaginable even as recently as a decade

» Players competing at a Tekken Force event in London, way back in 2011.

» Ryan Hart (player one) takes part in a round robin *Tekken 3* tournament on *GamesMaster*.

ago, never mind the notoriety.

"I think these kind of things have always happened inside the community. Back in the day, it used to be people had DVDs that they would share with a certain tournament, or they uploaded footage," says Michael. "But now, I think with the Tekken World Tour, we've been able to focus on pro players and show them to people outside of the *Tekken* community, so that they kind of understand the importance of these stories, like the rivalry between Japan and Korea or the emergence of Arslan Ash from Pakistan, that no one was watching up until he got the spotlight," he elaborates. "So I think just in the current climate, that spotlight has brought a lot of attention to the community, and showed that to outside people and garnered a lot of interest – not just from sponsors, but people who might not have played *Tekken* and just enjoy watching the player storylines that happen." So even if you don't want to chance your arm in combat, you might just enjoy competitive *Tekken* too.

GOING FOR GOLD

OUR DAY OUT AT A TEKKEN TOURNAMENT

Our interview with Katsuhiro Harada and Michael Murray took place at the Red Bull Gaming Sphere in London, where they were guests for the Red Bull Golden Letters invitational tournament. Twenty players from around the world – sixteen invitees and four winners of qualifying events – came together for an event with an unusual twist. By accumulating three 'perfect' or 'great' round victories, indicated by golden letters on the screen, a player could automatically win their match.

A number of spectators came to watch the event, and following the interview we sat with them to watch a level of play we could only dream of attaining. One particularly exciting match pitted Arslan Ash against SourPiggy, one of the players who had to qualify for the event – and it nearly ended in a real upset as SourPiggy's Kuma play was good enough to take things to the very last scrap of life. Despite the fact that the players weren't in the room with the spectators, a round of applause was given for the spirited performance.

In the end the finals came down to Korean player ULSAN, playing Dragunov, and AK of the Philippines who picked Shaheen. AK had pulled through the losers bracket to reach the finals after losing out to ULSAN in the semi-finals, but his efforts ultimately couldn't prevent a repeat performance, with the hard fought match ultimately going 3-1 in ULSAN's favour. Korean player CBM picked up third place, with the UK's Kaneandtrench finishing fourth.

» AK's Shaheen puts the pressure on ULSAN's Dragunov in the tournament final.

» It was a good live turnout, especially considering the event was also being streamed on Twitch and YouTube.

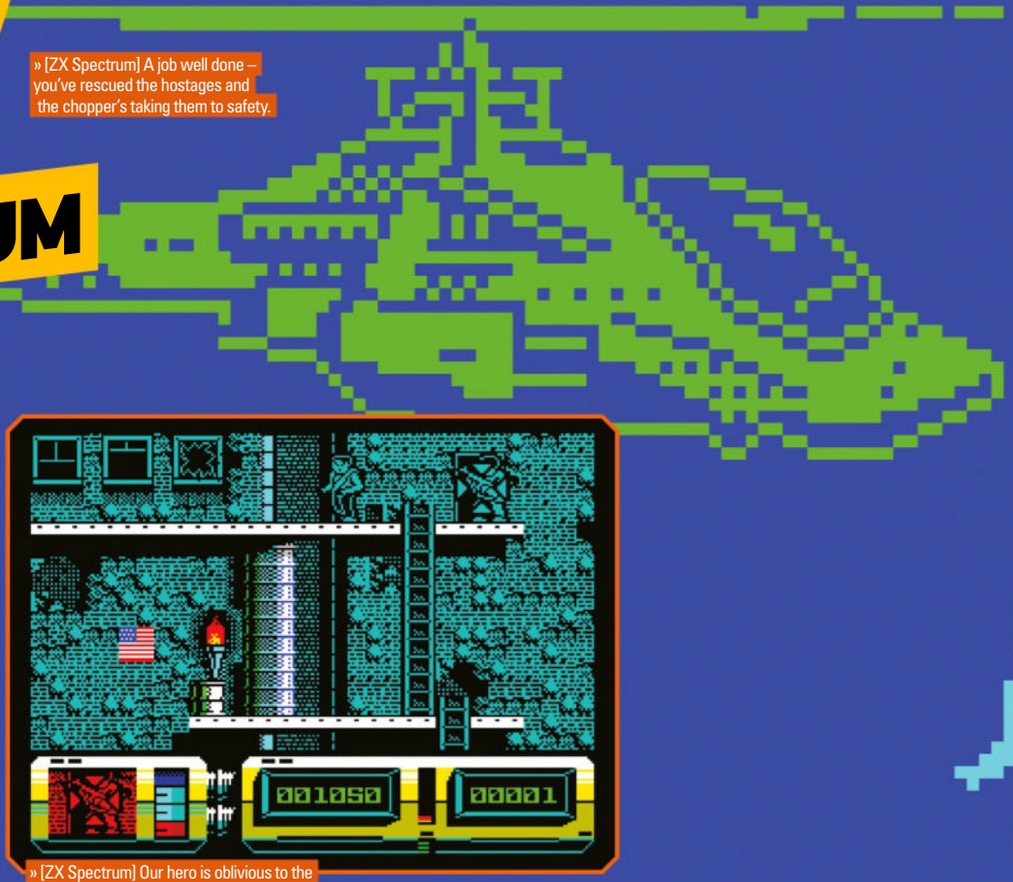
Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

ZX SPECTRUM

With The Spectrum hitting shelves now, we feel that it's high time to take a look at some lesser-known games that you may wish to try once you've exhausted the 48 built into the machine

Words by Nick Thorpe



» [ZX Spectrum] A job well done – you've rescued the hostages and the chopper's taking them to safety.

» [ZX Spectrum] Our hero is oblivious to the threat behind him, so pull the trigger now

» [ZX Spectrum] The tank battle looks exciting, but is probably the least interesting bit of the game.

» [ZX Spectrum] We see you lurking, window-dwelling villain, and we'll be the last thing you ever see.

ACTION FORCE II

■ DEVELOPER: **GANG OF FIVE** ■ YEAR: **1989**

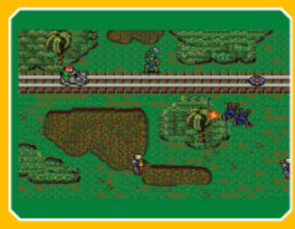
■ **Licensed games aren't typically renowned for their quality, and toy tie-ins are arguably lower in the pecking order than games based on movies or TV shows.** However, this one – based on the *GI Joe*-linked *Action Force* franchise – actually manages to pull off the trick of being a worthwhile game regardless of your level of interest in the toys. The premise is that evil Cobra terrorists have taken lots of innocent hostages, and Action Force has sent unarmed combat specialist Quick Kick in on a rescue mission. You don't control Quick Kick, though – instead you control Airtight, a chemical, biological and radiological warfare specialist, and provide covering fire for your comrade. What this means in practice is that you watch Quick Kick moving through the environment independently, and control a cursor with your joystick.

As threats make themselves apparent, you've got to take them out before they can launch a deadly attack. Naturally, this isn't particularly easy as Cobra's forces can be found lurking in trash cans, or drop large weights from windows. Often, they can appear suddenly from doorways and pop off a few machine gun rounds before you're able to take aim at them – and you'd better be accurate even if you're quick enough, as your cursor will jitter with the force of the shots you unleash. A certain amount of memorisation is needed to make significant progress since your cursor doesn't move particularly quickly, but its position carries over from screen to screen so you can prepare for threats in advance. Make it to the end of a stage and a chopper will arrive to take the hostages to safety, and you can choose a new weapon – machine gun, bazooka or bio gun – for the next stage. Every third stage requires you to take down a tank, waggling the joystick left and right to provide a steady rate of fire. Survive that and it's on to the next challenge.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

CROSSBOW
EXIDY, 1983

■ Rather than protecting themselves, arcade-goers found themselves protecting a band of wandering adventurers in this lightgun game. It's one of the earliest games in which you provide covering fire to more vulnerable allies.

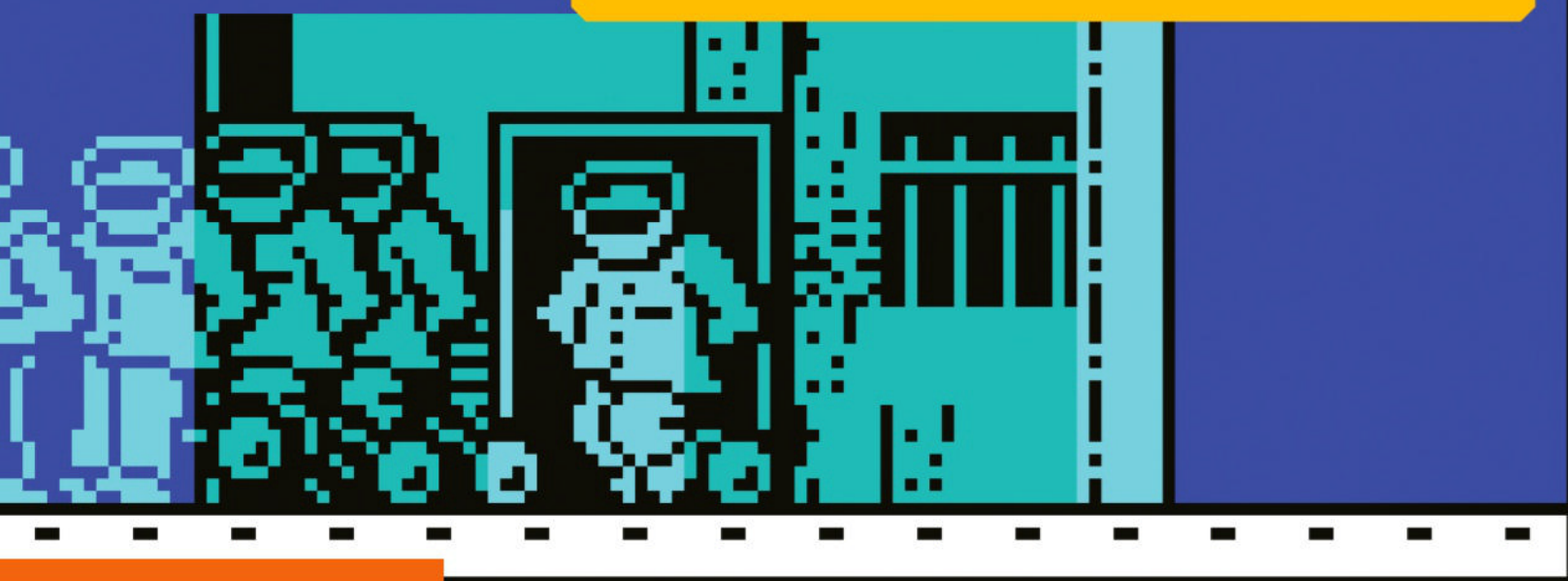


RESCUE MISSION
SEGA, 1987

■ This Master System take on the protect-'em-up shooter also uses a lightgun rather than a joystick. Your goal is to keep a combat medic safe as he goes behind enemy lines to treat the wounded. It's fun, but very tough.

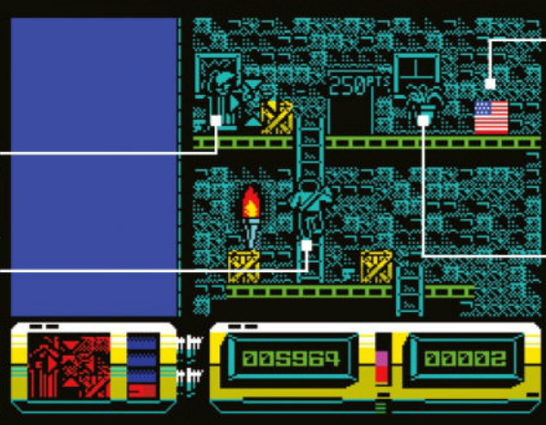
SENTINEL
IMAGINEERING, 1991

■ This Atari 7800 escort game uses a lightgun rather than relying on an on-screen cursor – noticing a pattern yet? You must protect a scientist who pilots a special energy-gathering orb, as he ventures to alien planets after Earth is invaded.



Action Force II is a good-looking game, from the initial screen that uses tricks to avoid the usual block colour restrictions of the Spectrum right through to the in-game graphics, and although it can be hard to spot the blue enemies against blue buildings, that's part of the challenge. If you're playing on a 128K machine, the music adds to the atmosphere nicely. However, what really makes the game stand out is its emphasis on providing support to an autonomous ally. The licence lends itself to a design where you take on enemies directly, and the developers did a great job of thinking outside of the box to come up with a more interesting design.

IN DEPTH



BIN THERE
■ This guy's hiding in a bin – take him out quickly, because his machine gun will definitely kill Quick Kick if you don't.

FLAGGING?
■ Quick Kick slowly loses energy as he traverses the stage, and you must shoot the American flags to replenish it.

QUICK THINKING
■ Thankfully, Quick Kick doesn't just have fast legs. He'll always take the optimal route, and you can rely on him not to dither.

FLOWER POWER
■ Not every enemy needs immediate attention. This dropped flower pot will sail past Quick Kick without incident, much to our relief.

Minority Report

Ssplat!

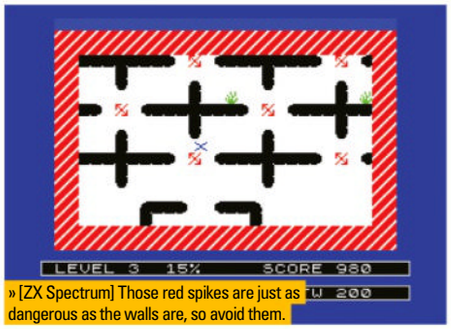
■ DEVELOPER: **IAN ANDREW/IAN MORGAN** ■ YEAR: **1983**

■ **This maze game from the early days of the Speccy rarely shows up when players put their minds together and list the system's top games, but it had a remarkably long shelf life – even appearing on compilations as late as 1992.** The game has one simple but very effective trick, which is that the maze scrolls independently of the player's movement, and changes direction without warning. You're free to navigate anywhere on the screen, but if you get caught on one of the red walls, you're splatted and a life is lost.

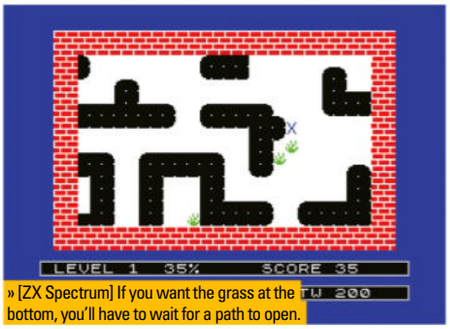
This means that you ideally want to be at the centre of the screen whenever possible, but life is never quite that straightforward. As well as walls that will block your way, you'll be tempted out to eat grass for points and collect extra lives, and as the game goes on you'll encounter increasingly narrow pathways and additional deadly spikes. The simple graphics are indicative of the game's early vintage, but it's easy to see why it kept coming back throughout the Spectrum's life – it's all too easy to take a risk, get caught out by a change in direction, and convince yourself that one more go will get you to the end of the game.

If you're interested to learn more about this quirky maze game, we ran an article about its creation all the way back in issue 98. [That's the one with *Metal Slug* on the cover – Ed]

» [ZX Spectrum] Narrow bridges begin to appear from the second level, slowing your progress.



» [ZX Spectrum] Those red spikes are just as dangerous as the walls are, so avoid them.



» [ZX Spectrum] If you want the grass at the bottom, you'll have to wait for a path to open.

More Games to Play

» Pippo

■ DEVELOPER: **G ZANETTI/P MALNATI**
■ YEAR:**1986**

■ *Pippo* is an enjoyable little maze game in which you have to paint all of the tiles a designated colour by stepping on them, while watching out for marauding baddies who try to kill you or reverse your progress. It's certainly not the most original concept to ever grace the humble Spectrum, but it does play rather well and the presentation includes some use of some rather neat hardware tricks. We really like it.

» Speedboat Assassins

■ DEVELOPER: **BINARY DESIGN**
■ YEAR:**1989**

■ *Knight Rider* has chased the baddies off the roads – now you've got to take them out in the water, thanks KITT. This involves dodging mines in your speedboat, before gunning down enemies and their communication towers. The boat's handling feels slightly too responsive, almost like you're driving a car, but the game performs well and the sprites are nice and detailed.

» Gunrunner

■ DEVELOPER: **CYBADYNE**
■ YEAR:**1987**

■ Aliens have attacked the planet Zero, and you need to fight your way to the defence computers, picking up shields, jetpacks and more to help yourself along. This entertaining run-and-gun affair received a fair amount of criticism for being unoriginal back in the Eighties, but it's actually an exceptionally well-made take on a standard concept, and should satisfy anyone who loves a challenging action game.

» Nifty Lifty

■ DEVELOPER: **KEVIN J BEZANT**
■ YEAR:**1984**

■ It may be a rather plain-looking game at its heart, but *Nifty Lifty* is deceptively compelling and is heaps of fun to play. Your goal is to get to the top of each stage and collect all the items – but to do it, you'll have to run past deadly moving elevators. This starts off simple, but when multiple elevators with different movement patterns become involved, things quickly become tricky. A great game with that, 'just one more go' factor to it.

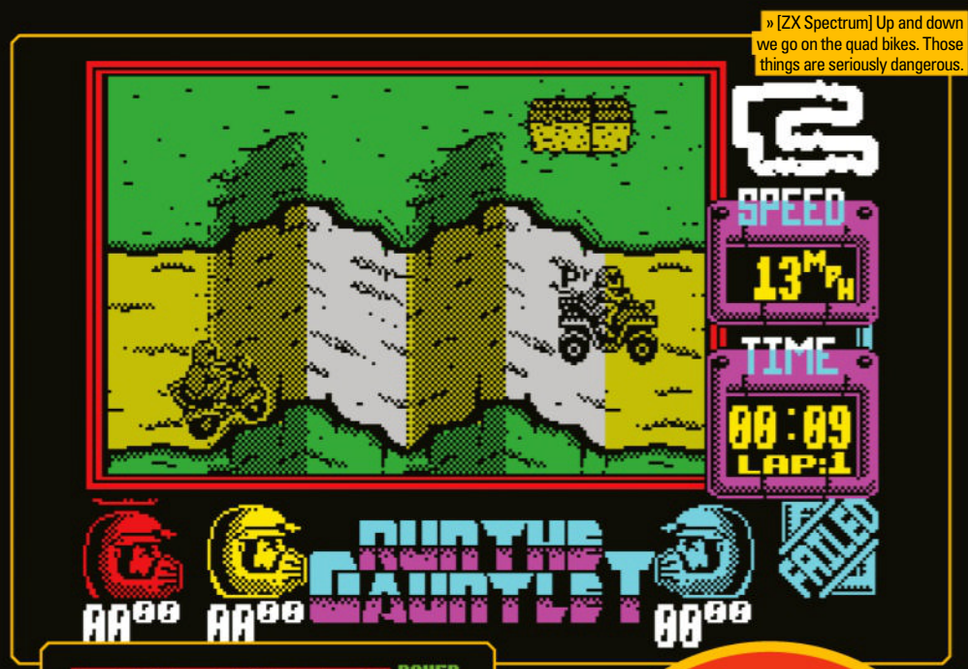
RUN THE GAUNTLET

■ DEVELOPER: **OCEAN** ■ YEAR: **1989**

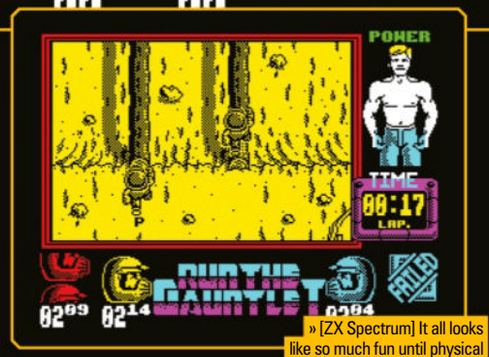
■ **If you remember the game show from the late-Eighties, you'll know exactly what this tie-in game is all about.** If not, allow us to fill you in – four international teams race for victory using a selection of vehicles on the road and across the water, before heading to The Hill for a final gruelling challenge on foot.

Road races take place on a pair of flick-screen courses viewed from an overhead perspective, and you'll get the chance to use one-man and two-man buggies, quad bikes and six-wheeled amphibious vehicles. On the water, you traverse a vertically scrolling stage using Jet Skis, hovercraft, speedboats and even inflatables. All of the vehicles naturally have different handling characteristics, which ensures that you'll have a good time even with a limited selection of tracks. The Hill is naturally all human endeavour and you don't get a selection of different people to play as, though there are at least different courses to tackle.

We can see why this racer might not get all the love, as it does suffer from a fairly annoying multiload and it can be challenging to control. However, it's well worth checking out as it's a pretty good-looking game that does give you a good deal of variety.



» [ZX Spectrum] Up and down we go on the quad bikes. Those things are seriously dangerous.



» [ZX Spectrum] It all looks like so much fun until physical effort comes into the picture.

RETRO STINKER

» CAGE MATCH

■ DEVELOPER: ICON DESIGN ■ 1987

■ **Aliens do battle in clumsy, unsatisfying fashion – in a cage.** We'd rather watch the infamous Kennel From Hell cage match than ever play this again.

» VIKING RAIDERS

■ DEVELOPER: **MARK LUCAS**
■ YEAR: **1985**

■ This interesting strategy game was a budget release from Firebird, and while it's not much to look at, it's good fun to conquer castles with your naval forces and catapults. You'll need to spend your gold wisely and avoid drinking horns that make your soldiers uncontrollable – and of course, watch out for the harsh winters that freeze the fjords. It's certainly tough, but worth playing.

» VALHALLA

■ DEVELOPER: **LEGEND**
■ YEAR: **1983**

■ *Valhalla* was a big, project for its era, with seven staff working on it and a bold £14.95 price tag, and it was ambitious too. While there's a quest to engage in if you choose to – and eventually, you will – it's entirely possible to enjoy *Valhalla* as a passive spectator, watching people wander about and play their roles without your input. It's one of the more interesting games in this list, so seek it out.

» STREAKER

■ DEVELOPER: **BULLDOG SOFTWARE**
■ YEAR: **1987**

■ We like this one not because of technical brilliance, but because of its unique concept – poor old Carlin is stranded on an alien planet without his clothes. He'll need to get dressed to get back to Earth, but buying clothes isn't easy when the shops won't let you in, so you'll have to find ways to cover his shame first. You'll also need to manage Carlin's energy, hunger and sleep levels as well.

» ACTION REFLEX

■ DEVELOPER: **CHRISTIAN F URQUHART**
■ YEAR: **1986**

■ Taking a side-on view, you've got to guide a ball safely through several screens of hazards, with nothing but the ability to roll and bounce at your disposal. As you can imagine, it's quite the tricky task, although having to control for momentum and height makes it a little different than your average platformer, and the obstacle course is full of fun hazards for you to overcome.

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ULTIMATE GUIDE

Fairlight

THE NAME FAIRLIGHT WILL MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE, BUT FOR FANS OF 8-BIT GAMING, NO DISAMBIGUATION IS NEEDED – FAIRLIGHT IS ONE OF THE FINEST ISOMETRIC ADVENTURES OF THE ERA. JOIN US AS WE RETURN TO THE LAND OF FAIRLIGHT AND CHAT TO ITS CREATOR, BO JANGEBORG

GUARD

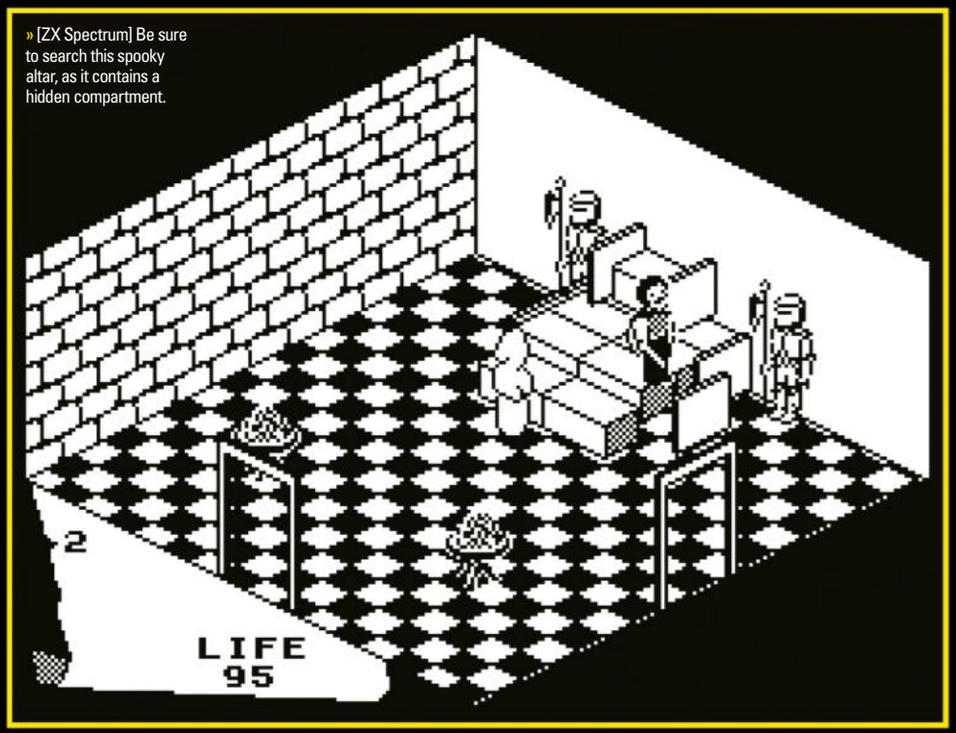
ISVAR

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

***Fairlight* is an amazing game.** It was hailed as an instant classic when it was released in 1985 and it has remained a fan favourite ever since – users of the old World Of Spectrum website voted it the third best Spectrum game of all time, behind only *The Great Escape* and *R-Type*.

What is perhaps even more amazing is that, had creator Bo Jangeborg had his wish, players would have been able to create *their own* arcade adventure epics just like *Fairlight*. You see, Bo always planned to share his box of tricks, to provide players with the tools to build worlds. This was evidenced with the release of The Artist, his own graphics package which was used to draw the sprites and objects seen in *Fairlight*, as well as its loading screen. For the game's environment – the Castle Avars, depicted in isometric, complete with floors, walls, windows and stairs – he used Grax, his graphics language that was to be sold commercially, just like The Artist. Bo's ultimate aim was to issue a fully fledged game creation package that would open up access to *Fairlight*'s 3D Worldmaker system.

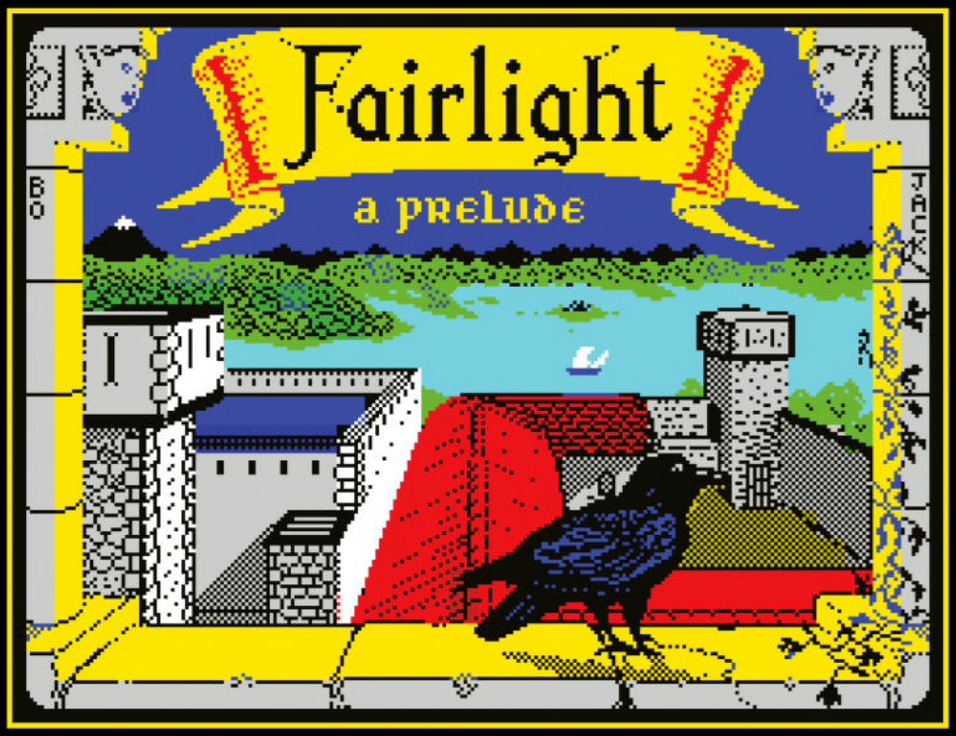
Sadly, these plans were derailed when Bo parted company with his publisher Softek, following a contract disagreement. This resulted in *Fairlight II* being released in an unfinished state (see A Betrayal Of Darkness panel), *Fairlight III* being scrapped, and both Grax and the proposed Worldmaker utility never seeing the light of day. Compounding a miserable situation, Bo stepped away from the industry and would never release another game. But at least he left behind *Fairlight* – a game so good we're still celebrating it almost 40 years later.



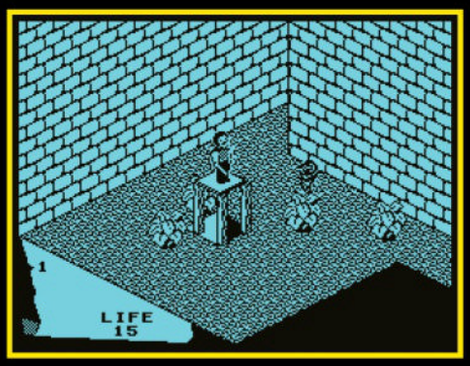
» [ZX Spectrum] Be sure to search this spooky altar, as it contains a hidden compartment.

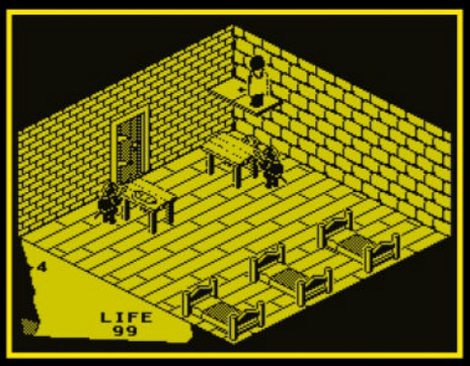
Fairlight was designed to satisfy a need – to give Softek an Ultimate-style isometric adventure for its flash new division, The Edge. Despite being directly influenced by *Knight Lore*, and even sharing a similar castle setting, it was unique in many ways, adding to the emerging genre rather than merely borrowing from it. The main difference was the variation in presentation. In *Knight Lore*, each room was fairly standard with four walls and up to four regularly placed exits. *Fairlight* did things differently and almost every location was unique. Some rooms filled the screen, others occupied just a small area in one corner. Some rooms had standard doorways, others had stairs leading to different floors or trapdoors in the floor/ceiling. Compared to Ultimate's polished titles, *Fairlight* felt more organic, less ordered, and that made exploring the game extra appealing.

> "Despite being directly influenced by Knight Lore, Fairlight was unique in many ways"

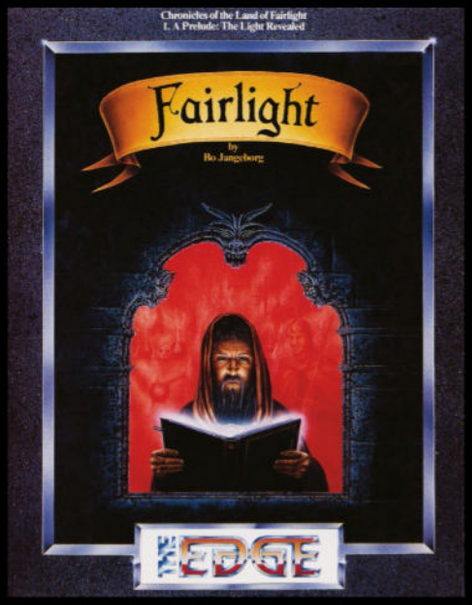


» [ZX Spectrum] The loading screen depicted the first-person view of the entrapped wizard, revealing that he was being held in the highest of the castle's three towers.





» A young Bo, pictured programming *Fairlight* on a Sinclair Spectrum connected to an Opus Discovery disk drive.



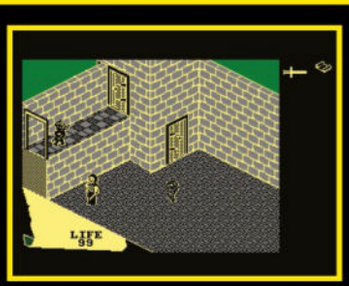
» The memorable cover artwork was painted by artist Stuart Hughes.

Conversion Capers

WHICH OF THE VERSIONS WAS THE FAIREST?

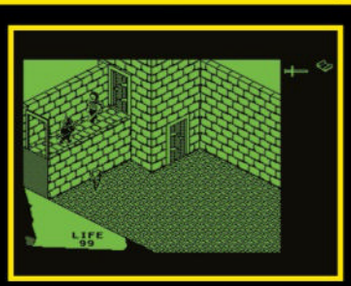
ZX Spectrum

■ The lead version is a true isometric classic for the Spectrum. It might play at a leaden pace, yet it's still the fastest version available, highlighting Bo's technical expertise. The title tune deserves a special mention – it's hard to believe it's playing on the old 'beeper'.



Amstrad CPC

■ This port is probably our favourite version. It's not quite as fast as the Speccy original, but the addition of some extra colour really brings the game to life and imbues everything with some extra… solidity. The only downside is the excellent intro music is not played in-game.



Amstrad PCW

■ A port of the CPC port and it plays just as well, running at a similar speed. Aside from the obvious lack of colour, sound is limited to Isvar's lonely footsteps. Few similar games were released for Amstrad's fancy typewriter, making this a must-have for PCW owners.

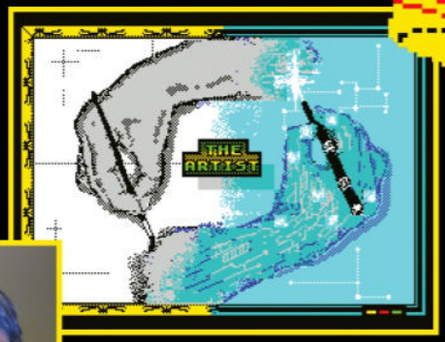
C64

■ This looks like the Speccy version, albeit a little more low-res, and plays at half the speed, making it hard to recommend. Some simple optimisations, such as reducing the enemy count, would have helped. One big plus point: music plays throughout and it's wonderful.

Bo Jangeborg Q&A

FAIRLIGHT'S PROGRAMMER TAKES US BACK TO THE BEGINNING

» [ZX Spectrum] Bo's first game *Shoot 'Em Down* was included on a Swedish magazine tape.



» [ZX Spectrum] Many budding gamemakers will surely remember The Artist, Bo's popular drawing program.

» *Fairlight* creator Bo Jangeborg, who would leave games behind to focus on developing business software.

What was your path into computing and games programming?
The first computer I had some experience with was a Swedish machine called the ABC 80. This was a Z80-based computer and it only had about 8KB of memory, so you couldn't do very much with it. But it had a nice big keyboard and I got acquainted with BASIC on that. This was around 1980. Then in 1983 I got my own first computer, which was a Sinclair Spectrum.

Was the Spectrum popular in Sweden?
It was quite popular, but still behind the Commodore computers. The Spectrum's sound and graphics were lacking compared to the Commodore 64, but a faster processor and lower price made up for some of that. It was especially important in being a starting point for many programmers.

Including yourself. Can you tell us what your first commercial game was?
I wouldn't really call it commercial, but I did a little shooty thingy called *Shoot 'Em Down*. This was released for one of the popular cassette magazines in Sweden. You basically had a magazine which wasn't much more than a piece of cardboard with a glued-on tape.

How did you move from that to your next game, *Fairlight*?
I travelled over to England to meet with Softek, who was interested in publishing my graphics package The Artist. Whilst there I saw the Softek guys were trying to copy what Ultimate was doing with *Knight Lore*, but they couldn't get it to work without the graphics really, really flickering. I used my sprite routine from *Shoot 'Em Down* to show them technically how you could do a nice isometric game. They were amazed and I started working on *Fairlight* straightaway. I wasn't copying *Knight Lore* really, apart from the perspective, which Ultimate copied from *Zaxxon*!

So your trip to England was slightly extended?
Yeah, I was supposed to do The Artist deal and then go back to Sweden, but I ended up staying for seven months. I would have been aged 22 at this point. It was a fun experience for me, living in London and developing *Fairlight*. The problems with Softek started later.

> "It was a fun experience, living in London and developing Fairlight..."

There was however a problem with the original *Fairlight* release?
The game wasn't properly beta tested. I was working on it until the very last minute and that caused a problem with the Kempston joystick, so people got replacement copies. But apart from that, I don't think there were any real problems with *Fairlight*.

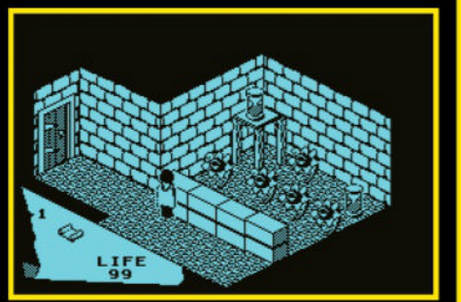
How did it work with payment? Was it royalty based?
We made a deal from the very beginning that I would get a straight royalty. So Softek wasn't paying me anything up front for *Fairlight*. I was taking quite a risk on that one, but the game sold well. I don't think it was close to what Ultimate was selling, but it was a big seller at the time. I made a fair bit of money out of it.

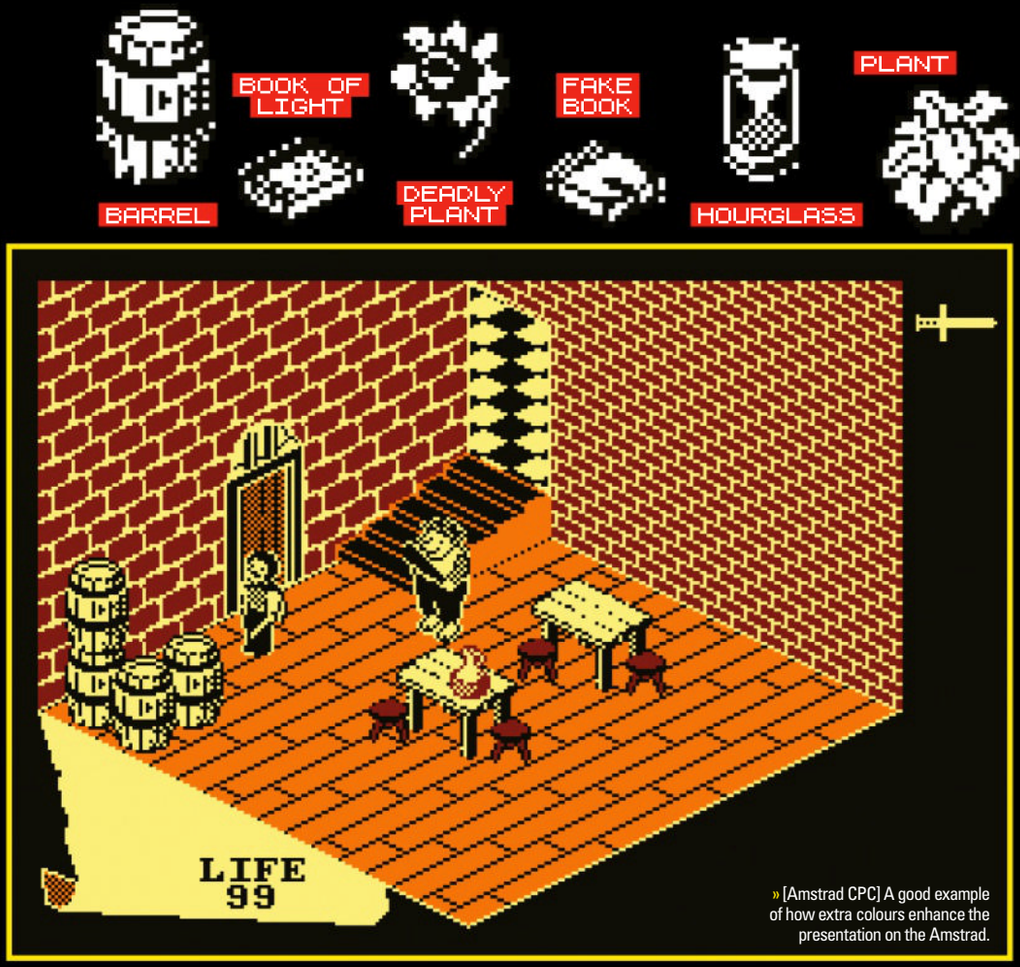
And you got your name displayed alongside the game's title too?
I think they realised that I was a bit unique so marketing *me* made sense. I also required it to sign the contract.

Did you have anything to do with the conversions?
No, the guys who did them had a bit of help from me, but I wasn't involved in the programming at all. The C64 version was done by the same guy who did *Brian Bloodaxe* [Trevor Inns].

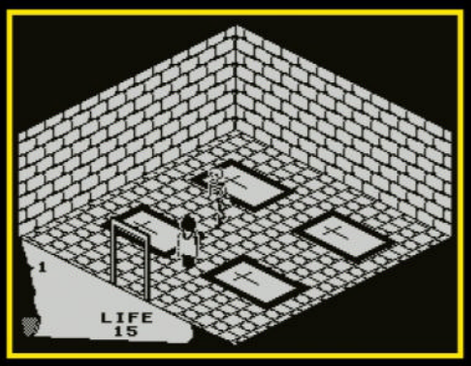
Your relationship with Softek fell apart during the development of *Fairlight II*. Looking back, would you have done anything differently?
Not really. Maybe I should have tried to retain my copyright – I signed over the rights to *Fairlight* to Softek – but I was glad to be rid of them. I wanted to develop a third game, but I had no fixed plans for it. I also wanted to release my mini graphics language Grax, but I never got to the point of turning it into a commercial product. You know, the past is the past. No point in dwelling on earlier mistakes.

Returning to the original game, how do you view it and its reputation these days?
Fairlight has been a source of pride for me. I have always appreciated the love I have gotten from fans, to hear they enjoyed playing it.

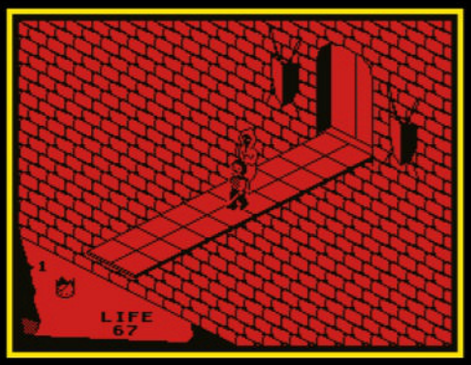




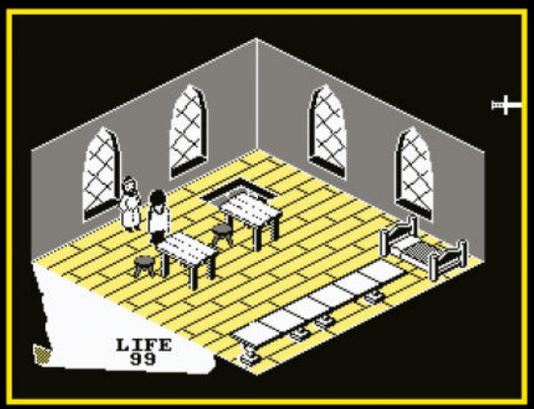
» [Amstrad CPC] A good example of how extra colours enhance the presentation on the Amstrad.



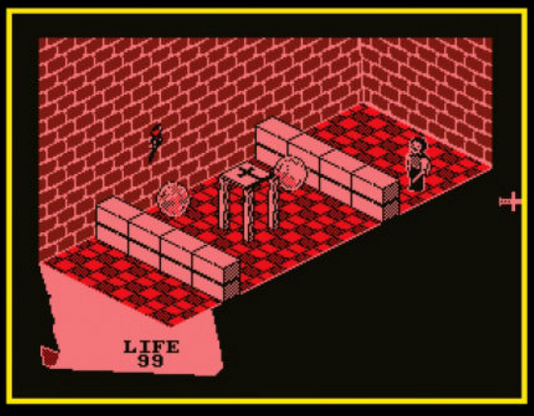
» [ZX Spectrum] The special Spectrum 128K version adds in a new crypt location where you'll get bothered by old skelly bones.



» [ZX Spectrum] It's possible to run past the wraiths on the bridges, but it's far easier to freeze them using the hourglass item.



» [Amstrad CPC] Hurrah! You've finally made it to the wizard at the top of the tower. However, not all is as it seems…



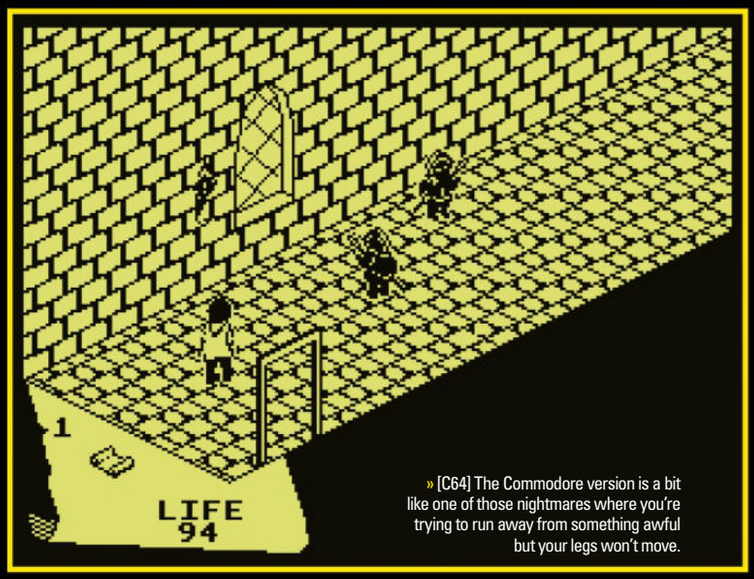
The game was also more puzzle-based than similar titles. You could tell that Bo was a big fan of text adventures as *Fairlight* was littered with objects for the hero Isvar to collect – a mix of red herrings, handy pick-ups and vital objects that aided progress. And just like text adventures, some of the puzzles were so obscure you wondered how anyone solved them without ripping out their hair. Or cheating. One infamous puzzle involved the location of the game's MacGuffin, the fabled Book Of Light, which you had to locate in order to free the wizard and complete the game. According to the manual, the book "can only be approached by the king", so the first thing you needed to do was locate the king's crown. That was the easy bit. The book itself was hidden in a secret room, and the only way to access it was to wear the crown and basically push along every wall in the game until you stumbled across the hidden door. And even when you found it, there was one final red herring inside designed to trip you up.

Another text adventure influence was that each object had its own size and weight attributes, meaning you had to carefully manage your inventory and backtrack where necessary. It was also possible to stack objects on top of each other, to create makeshift steps to help you reach inaccessible objects and doorways. Cue Isvar trying to reach a key on a high shelf, while wobbling on a stool that was balanced on a barrel that was sitting on a pot plant and two loaves of bread. Sometimes you had to get creative.

The lead Spectrum version was developed over a six-month period, with Bo as the programmer and designer. Bo also drew the backgrounds and the lead Isvar sprite, while a young chap named Jack Wilkes contributed the other sprites and also drew the loading screen. Softek boss Tim Langdell wrote the backstory included in the manual, and the hooded wizard featured on the cover-art was based on his likeness. But this was Bo's game. Indeed, his name appeared front and centre, next to the title.

> "This was Bo's game… his name appeared front and centre, next to the title"

Fairlight scored strong reviews when it arrived in September 1985. *Sinclair User* was one of several mags that rated it higher than Ultimate's forerunners. "The graphics are the best we've seen of the 3D variety, streets ahead of *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8* for variety and elegance of design," wrote Chris Bourne. "This has got to be one of the best arcade adventure quests ▶

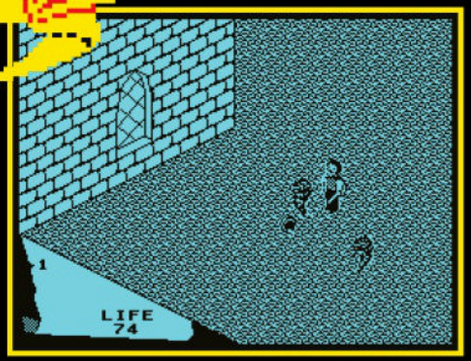


» [C64] The Commodore version is a bit like one of those nightmares where you're trying to run away from something awful but your legs won't move.

» *Fairlight: The Legend* featured some brand-new cover-art, but it was just the two games repackaged at a lower price.

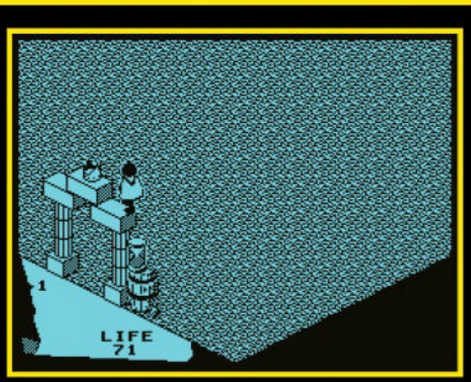
King Of The Castle

YOU WON'T GET VERY FAR WITHOUT THESE PLAYING TIPS



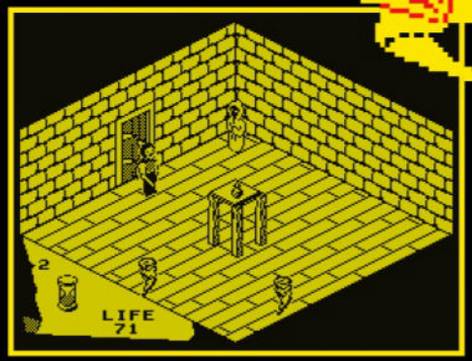
Respawn No More

■ Enemies will keep on respawning, but it's possible to permanently kill the two most common enemies, guards and trolls. For guards, take their fallen helmets and feed them to a nearby whirlwind. For trolls, drop a barrel on the exact spot where you defeated them.



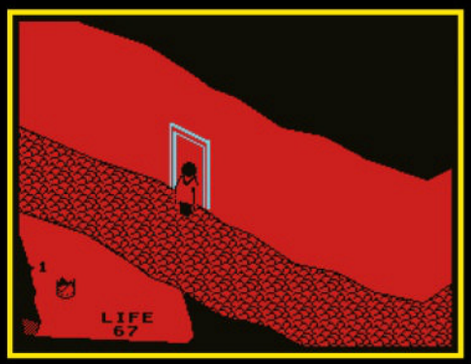
Death Stairs

■ Several puzzles involve reaching high-up objects or trapdoors in ceilings. You can use any collectable object to build stairs, but the best are the stools and barrels which are in plentiful supply. Whatever you use to stack, it's liable to all go a bit Frank Spencer.



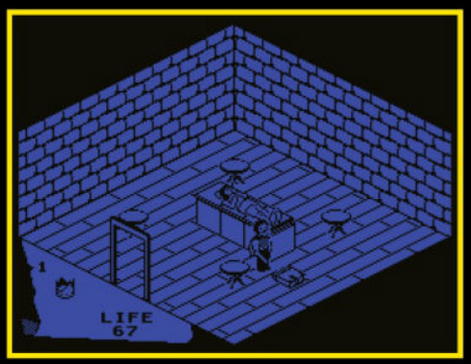
Pause For Thought

■ The hourglass is a handy object that freezes all on-screen enemies. It's best used to stop those annoying wraiths – such as the one in the room with the potion on a pedestal (pictured), or the pair on the castle bridges who merrily like to push you to your doom.



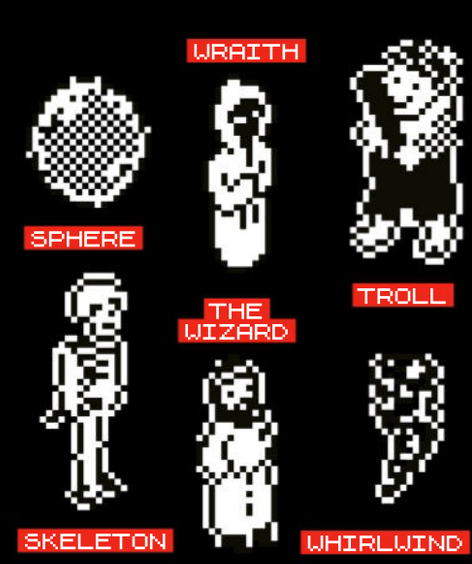
That Damned Door

■ The most crucial puzzle in the game – finding the Book Of Light – is also the most obscure, as the doorway is invisible! It's outside the castle, down from the cave entrance, and to help we've marked its location on this screenshot. You must also be holding the crown to enter.



Book Of Darkness

■ There are actually two books in the game – the Book Of Light and a sneaky fake. The first you encounter is the fake (pictured). To find the real one, push at the tomb lid to move it aside. Climb in and you'll drop into a secret sub-basement where the real book is located.



▶ of the year." *Crash* magazine's three-headed reviewer followed suit, "Ultimate introduced us to realistic 3D graphics but sadly not a lot of game was bolted on. Now that gap has been filled. This knocks *Filmation* and *Filmation 2* into a cocked hat." Crash buyers also loved it, with the game winning the Best Arcade Adventure, Best Graphics, Best Music and State Of The Art awards in the magazine's 1985 Readers Awards.

"Fans knew the true resolution to Isvar's quest was lost to time and circumstance"

The success continued into early 1986, when *Fairlight* was converted to the Commodore 64 (by Trevor Inns) and Amstrad CPC and PCW (both by Andy Wright). Despite it being a painfully slow Spectrum port, the C64 version sizzled in *Zzap!64*. The CPC reviews were slightly cooler, probably because by the time it was released, new isometric titles like *Get Dexter* and *Batman* were stealing the limelight. One criticism of the Spectrum original was that the game itself was silent – you didn't even hear Isvar's footsteps like in the other versions – so Softek released a dedicated 128K release that featured a fantastic in-game tune. There were also other enhancements – apparently. "The Edge swears there are new monsters and at least one extra secret passage," wrote Rachael Smith in *Your Sinclair*, "but I couldn't find them." Well, there actually was a new nine-room crypt installed beneath the castle, where skeletons roamed, but it added nothing to the story and you weren't required to visit it to complete the quest.

Bo doesn't remember there *even being* a Spectrum 128K version, which suggests it was a Softek undertaking. Besides, he was busy finishing – or rather not quite finishing – the sequel, before he parted company with his publisher. With Bo out of the picture, there was one further release, *Fairlight: The Legend*, which was just a collection of the first two titles issued in 1988. As the sequel was split into two parts, this release was cheekily billed as the *Fairlight Trilogy*, but fans knew the true resolution to Isvar's quest was lost to time and circumstance. Perhaps the closest thing there was to a third game was *Inside Outing* (aka *Raffles*), an isometric adventure written by Michael St Aubyn, that used an enhanced version of Bo's 3D Worldmaker system.

Fast-forward to 2024 and we have the release of Retro Games Ltd's The Spectrum. The inclusion of *Fairlight* as one of the built-in titles means that Bo's amazing game can now be enjoyed by adventurers old and new. ✱

» [PC] A PC remake was being produced independently by Richard Jordan, but it never progressed beyond a short demo.

A Betrayal Of Darkness

HOW THE SEQUEL BROKE THE SPELL

» [Amstrad CPC] The sequel begins with Isvar standing outside Castle Avars, pondering his next move.

» [ZX Spectrum] The end scene teases the next chapter, which was sadly never realised.

The original game's manual promised a sequel and it duly arrived in late 1986, for the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and PCW (a C64 version was on the cards but later canned). Subtitled *A Trail Of Darkness*, it picked up immediately after the end of the original, with Isvar resuming his search for the Book Of Light across the wider land of Fairlight. The follow-up was much bigger, with a larger map split over two loads, and it introduced multiple new enemies and challenges. But something was awry. You could tell that the original had been meticulously planned, yet the sequel felt much looser. You could complete the first part without visiting maybe 80% of the map, for instance, and the way some of the rooms linked up felt like a bodge. It was almost as if the game *wasn't finished*.

We now know that's exactly what happened with the lead Spectrum version. Bo believes he had about two weeks of work left to do on the game, but the relationship with the publisher broke down and it was ultimately released in an unfinished state. Worse, a bug at the end made it impossible to complete the game, taking the shine off what should have been a beautiful sequel.

Save Your Bacon

BRINGING HOME THE BACON

» BBC MICRO » 1988 » LAWSON B WAKEFIELD

Covertapes were an essential part of any child's gaming collection growing up. They were attached to your favourite magazine, and came with a number of games to help pass away the time while you waited patiently for your birthday to arrive (and hopefully that full-price game you wanted).

Sometimes covertapes would be filled with any old shovelware the magazine publisher could get its hands on, but just as many had fantastic gems that could have easily stood alone as proper paid releases. *Save Your Bacon* is one such game.

Originally given away with an early 1988 issue of *Disk User*, to my knowledge the game never received an official retail release. That's a shame because it's a lot of fun to play, even if it is rather basic in terms of its visuals and mechanics. I'd have happily paid £1.99 for an Amstrad version of the game, but alas, it was never meant to be.

Taking the form of a basic, single-screen action game, the aim as Porky The Pig (no, not that one) is to collect your bacon before Marvin The Mutt is able to gobble each piece up. As play progresses, Marvin is joined by his brother Griswald, which increases the challenge as poor Porky is ruthlessly hunted down. Fortunately, Porky's best mate, Kevin The Kamikaze Cat (no, really) can be hurled at the two canines to temporarily stun them while Porky collects his bacon. Once enough bacon pieces have been snaffled, Porky can move to the next stage.

If the above fever dream scenario feels flimsier than a house of cards made out of wafers that's because it is. It is a surprising amount of fun though, as the randomness of both your pork chops and the erratic speed and movement of your canine foes means you're always kept on your toes.

I'm not sure where you currently are, or if you're still programming, Lawson B Wakefield, but thanks so much for making such an entertaining little game.

STY

THE MAKING OF Gimmick!

THIS IS THE TALE OF GIMMICK! AND HOW ONE OF THE NES' BEST-KEPT SECRETS TOOK YEARS TO DEVELOP AND ALMOST GOT SHUT DOWN – TWICE! IT'S ALSO A STORY ABOUT REDEMPTION AND HOW A FORGOTTEN GEM ROSE FROM OBSCURITY TO BECOME A CLASSIC

WORDS BY JIMMY HÅKANSSON

TOMOMI SAKAI

Today, Tomomi Sakai runs an importing agency focussing on astronomical equipment. Among his clients is The National Astronomical Observatory Of Japan.

At first glance, Sunsoft's *Gimmick!* looks like your everyday 16-bit platformer. With one key exception: it's an 8-bit game. The NES game *Gimmick!* – or *Mr Gimmick*, as it was renamed in Scandinavia for its only release outside Japan – is a technical marvel in every aspect, from its vibrant graphics to its advanced gameplay features. No wonder it took three years to develop, which, for a NES game, is remarkably long.

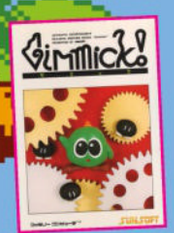
Despite the technical prowess of *Gimmick!*, the game didn't get the reception it deserved at the time. When it was showcased at the Tokyo Toy Show prior to its release, it initially caught the attention of potential distributors. However, their interest faded when they realised it wasn't a game made for the Super Nintendo or any of the hyped-up 16-bit consoles. The reasoning behind making the game for the 8-bit machine rather than its more powerful successors was simple, explains the game's director, Tomomi Sakai, "At the time when development began, the NES was still the dominant platform."

The problem, however, was that the development of *Gimmick!* started way back in 1989, but it wasn't released until 1992. For a game of its era, such a drawn-out production phase was unprecedented. "We were trying to achieve something meaningful with a small team," Sakai explains when asked about the unusually lengthy production time.

In the late-Eighties, Japanese game company Sunsoft was on a roll. With stellar NES games like *Blaster Master* and *Batman*, the company had its own way of doing things. But *Gimmick!* was special and was treated accordingly. "Sunsoft's typical style was to assign whoever was available to projects, but *Gimmick!* was different," continues Sakai. "I selected the most suitable staff and without any one of them, *Gimmick!* would not have been completed."

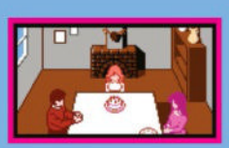
Sakai assembled a highly skilled and motivated group, each member firing on all cylinders and contributing significantly to the project. "The internal team consisted of just two people: myself and [Hiroyuki] Kagoya. In addition, there was [Masashi] Kageyama, who composed the music, and [Naohisa] Morota, who programmed the

» [NES] Yumetaro is transported to the wondrous world of *Gimmick!* to save the girl.



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SUNSOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** SUNSOFT
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PLATFORM:** NES
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER



» [NES] *Gimmick!*'s story begins when a girl gets a birthday present from her father.

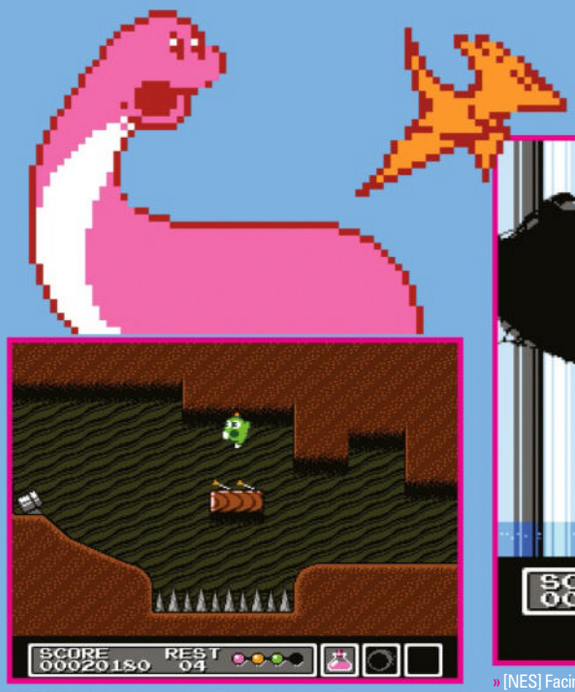
» [NES] The girl unwraps her birthday gift and is greeted by a green stuffed animal – Yumetaro.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BLASTER MASTER
RELEASED: 1988
PLATFORM: NES

BATMAN (PICTURED)
RELEASED: 1989
PLATFORM: NES

JOURNEY TO SILIUS
RELEASED: 1990
PLATFORM: NES



» [NES] The hero Yumetaro leaps in the air to avoid a swarm of arrows.

» [NES] Facing off against a snail boss, Yumetaro uses star magic to defeat his rival.

» [NES] The world of *Gimmick!* is inhabited by fierce foes. Sometimes riding equally fierce ostriches.

"I WANTED TO CREATE A WORLD WITH A SENSE OF REALISM. I FIND IT UNNATURAL WHEN ENEMIES DO THINGS THAT REAL LIVING BEINGS WOULD NEVER DO"
TOMOMI SAKAI

music. Although they weren't part of the team, we also had [Shinichi] Seya, who wrote the sound driver, and [Akihiro] Asada, who designed the custom chip. I chose them because I knew they were capable of delivering on my expectations."

And Sakai's expectations were high indeed, "I was aiming to create the pinnacle of NES games," he says. Regardless of the team's motivation and skill, *Gimmick!* was a time-consuming endeavour. Sakai was committed to creating the best possible NES game. One of the key elements to achieve that was the music, a lush original soundtrack ranging from pop to jazz written by Masashi Kageyama. Sakai remembers when he stumbled upon Kageyama's work on the PC Engine game *Out Live*. "I was immediately hooked the first time I heard it. Later, I also listened to his work on *Benkei Gaiden*, and it was fantastic as well. His music is creative, cool, beautiful and stylish. I knew I wanted him to compose the music for *Gimmick!*."

When it came to sound quality, the limitations of the hardware became painfully obvious. The NES couldn't handle Kageyama's complex songwriting. But Sakai was adamant in his vision, and he refused to compromise. "I wanted to reproduce Kageyama's music as faithfully as possible to the original composition," he says. To achieve this, Sunsoft created a custom sound chip, similar to what companies like Namco and Konami had done before. The result was a soundtrack that arguably surpassed much of its generation, and to this day, Kageyama's score is celebrated by fans.

But *Gimmick!*'s most lauded feature is undoubtedly its intricate and unique gameplay mechanics. The main character, a green stuffed animal named Yumetaro (not Mr Gimmick as one might presume), has the power to summon magical stars, which serve as both a weapon and a bouncing platform. Mastering the timing of jumps allows players to ride the stars to access secret passages or hard-to-reach areas. Yumetaro's star is even affected by how you toss it, and on what surface. Run and throw it and it will gain momentum. Or bounce it on a wall to position it for a perfect landing. For a NES game, the attention to detail is astounding. "The game incorporates many new ideas and techniques that weren't seen before. I think that's why the overall system exceeded the standards of that era," Sakai says.

The world of *Gimmick!* is a colourful place inhabited by highly intelligent enemies, where even the smallest foes are hellbent on defeating Yumetaro and offer a challenge akin to a mini-boss. The enemies' authentic behaviour contributes to creating a sense ▶

UPDATING GIMMICK!

THE CULT NES GAME GETS A SEQUEL

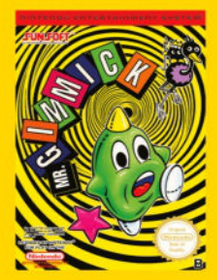
Three decades and six console generations later, *Gimmick!* returns for another go. But this time, it's not Sunsoft behind the wheel. The green hero, Yumetaro, has travelled around the world, from Japan to Sweden, as the Gothenburg-based studio Bitwave Games takes up the baton from Sunsoft. For *Gimmick! 2*'s game director, Niklas Istenes, it's a childhood dream come true.

"I used to play the original *Gimmick!* when I was growing up, and I loved it even though it was so hard," he says. "When I picked it up decades later, I strongly felt that the imaginative world and the unique gameplay of *Gimmick!* deserved a sequel that highlighted the original's inherent qualities."

Gimmick! 2 reuses the same physics-based gameplay formula as the NES original, but with updated graphics and quality-of-life upgrades. The main challenge for Bitwave Games when creating the *Gimmick!* sequel was to both modernise the original gameplay and make it more accessible for a new audience, while still honouring the game's legacy. "It is a balancing act for sure," Niklas says. "We tried lots of different ideas, but in the end, we stayed true to the core of what made the original great and enhanced it to make the experience more accessible for newcomers but also added depth for veterans."

A SWEDISH COLLECTIBLE

THE FORGOTTEN GEM TURNED SOUGHT-AFTER CLASSIC



When *Gimmick!* was released for the NES in early 1992, it was quickly buried in the buzz surrounding the new 16-bit consoles. By then, the NES was past its prime. *Gimmick!* boasted an advanced physics engine and unique gameplay mechanics that made it stand apart from similar games, but it still wasn't enough to build the momentum needed to catch the audience's attention. In response to the lack of success, Sunsoft shelved plans to localise the game for Western markets.

The only distributor outside Japan that picked it up was the Swedish company Bergsala. But it only ordered a small quantity of the game, which they renamed *Mr Gimmick* for its 1993 Scandinavian release. This version also lacked the custom sound chip that Sunsoft had developed specifically to reproduce Masashi Kageyama's soundtrack. Another difference was the difficulty. The Scandinavian version gave players eight lives instead of the original four, with the intent to make it slightly easier.

The limited edition, combined with the game's reputation as one of the most technically impressive titles on the NES, has since driven its value sky-high in the retro-gaming market. Copies of the Scandinavian PAL version now fetch substantial prices, making it a prized possession for collectors.

of a living, breathing world, as demonstrated in one stage where the player can reach a pirate boss earlier than intended, only to find him taking a nap. "I wanted to create a world with a sense of realism," Sakai says. "I find it unnatural when enemies do things that real living beings would never do."

The clever opponents combined with a devious level design, has made *Gimmick!* notorious for having a steep difficulty curve. So much so that Bitwave Games added a rewind function in its 2023 remaster. Sakai, however, argues that the game isn't difficult at all. Instead it's the gamers that have gone soft. "I think it's partly a generational difference," he offers. "Modern games are easier compared to older ones, so older games might seem more difficult. Personally, I don't think *Gimmick!* is any more difficult than games like *Mario* or *Mega Man*. Other Sunsoft developers played *Gimmick!* as well, and they were able to play it just fine."

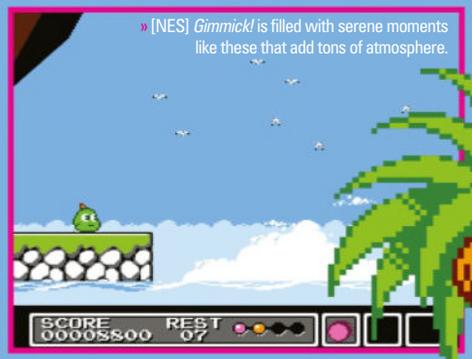
With *Gimmick!*, Sakai and his team set out to create something extraordinary. Together, they pushed the 8-bit console to its limits to make a game that challenged everything that had come before. Even though Sunsoft for a long time considered it a special project, Sakai admits the management grew weary of the lengthy development process. "Management considered cancelling the project because development took so long. However, after showing them what we had created so far, they decided to continue. This happened twice, I think."

» [NES] The star summoned by Yumetaro can be used both as a weapon and a ride.

Ultimately, it was the team's pursuit of perfection that hampered the game's chances of success. By the time *Gimmick!* was ready to launch, the world had moved on. The NES had lost its iron grip on the market, and the 8-bit era was over. Plans to localise the game for the North American market were shelved, partly due to concerns that the characters were too weird and quirky compared to popular Western cartoons, and also because distributors and publishers feared that a NES game – albeit a technically perfected NES game – would

> "DISTRIBUTORS DON'T KNOW HOW TO RECOGNISE A GAME'S QUALITY"
> TOMOMI SAKAI

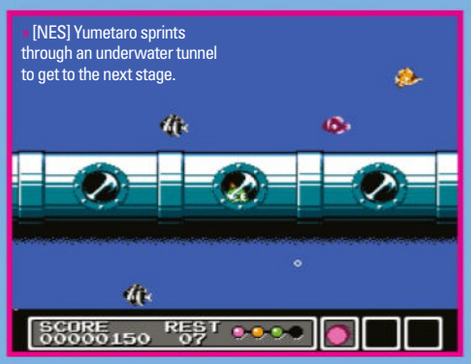
» [NES] If you can't beat them – ride them. Yumetaro can hitch a ride on his enemies.



» [NES] *Gimmick!* is filled with serene moments like these that add tons of atmosphere.

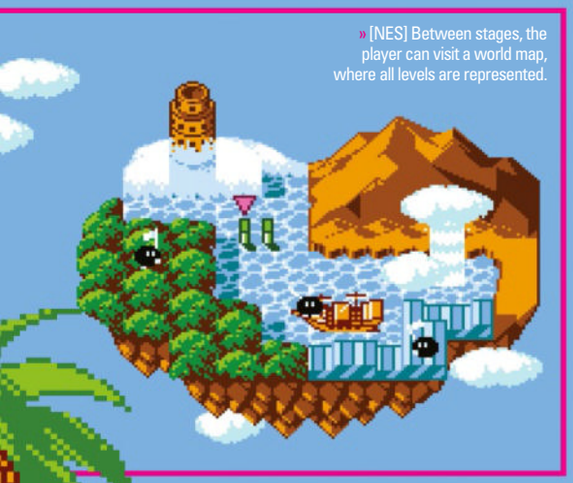
» [NES] Sleepy Yumetaro shows off one of his many talents: star riding.

» [NES] Everywhere there are secrets to discover. What hides behind that crack in the wall?



» [NES] Yumetaro sprints through an underwater tunnel to get to the next stage.

» [NES] Yumetaro hops on a small dinghy to hunt down and board a pirate ship.



» [NES] Between stages, the player can visit a world map, where all levels are represented.

» [NES] Not all enemies are out to get Yumetaro, like this pink dinosaur.

be overshadowed by the 16-bit craze. "Distributors don't know how to recognise a game's quality. They couldn't see the value in *Gimmick!* and so only ordered a small number of copies," Sakai says. "I later had a similar experience. When my company released a game called *RC*, one distributor said they wouldn't buy it because it wasn't good. However, the game won first place in the Game Design category of a user poll in a magazine dedicated to the X68000, and it continued to sell for three years, becoming the longest-selling game on the X68000."

The only distributor outside Japan that picked up the game was the Swedish company Bergsala. It ordered a small quantity, renamed the game *Mr Gimmick*, and released it in Scandinavia. By then, the Sunsoft days were over for Tomomi Sakai. Right before the launch, he left the company to seek out new adventures. As for *Gimmick!*, the distributors were right. The SNES games of the time stole all the spotlight and left Yumetaro in the shade. "In my experience, whether a game gains widespread recognition or not is influenced by many factors, and often these factors are more important than the actual quality of the game itself," Sakai says.

Tomomi Sakai recalls it wasn't until *Gimmick!* made an appearance on a Japanese TV show that the game experienced a resurgence. "*Gimmick!* remained largely unknown for many years. It was only after it was featured on a TV show and praised in a column in *Famitsu* by Masahiro Sakurai, the designer of Kirby, that its recognition began to rise. With that in mind, if a company skilled in promotion had properly understood *Gimmick!* and promoted it effectively, it might have sold much better."

On 20 June 2024, the Swedish game company Bitwave Games – the same studio responsible for the 2023 remaster – announced that it was working on a sequel. Three months later, *Gimmick! 2* was released for all current platforms, including Nintendo Switch and PlayStation 5. That a 32-year-old NES game was getting a sequel came as a surprise to many – Tomomi Sakai among them. "I only learned about it just before the announcement when I received an email from Sunsoft. The next day, I received messages on my email and X asking if I was involved. I posted on X to clarify that I wasn't."

Although the original *Gimmick!* didn't have a massive impact, it touched the hearts of those who played it. Over the years, *Gimmick!* has grown a cult following and has rightfully been redeemed and re-evaluated as one of the most accomplished gems on the NES console. But to this day, it's not a game for everyone. And perhaps, that was never the intention. "When I was younger, I heard the term 'musician's musician' and I thought I'd like to do something similar with games," Sakai says. "I've received emails from people saying they became developers after playing my game. Thinking about that, I feel like I might have achieved that goal." ✱

THE RETRO GAMER GUIDE TO

CAPCOM CPS-1

WITH COMPETITION IN ARCADE HEATING UP, CAPCOM DECIDED TO UP ITS GAME WITH A BRAND-NEW ARCADE BOARD. WE REVISIT EVERY GAME RELEASED FOR THE POPULAR SYSTEM

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES

In the early Eighties, Capcom had huge hits with the likes of *1942*, *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, *Commando* and *Side Arms*. While these games were really popular for the company, they were quickly superseded by the introduction of Capcom's CPS board, which saw the arcade developer really start to move away from the pack.

Capcom's new board was designed to be able to run a selection of different games on it that would not only reduce hardware costs when making new games, but would be more enticing to arcade operators, too. The original CPS-1 board was a huge success and Capcom released numerous games for it. The downside was that it was easy to bootleg and Capcom itself began cannibalising many of its older games for the system after *Street Fighter II* became a success. While the board was capable of producing some great-looking games, Capcom did make some improvements to it, introducing the CP System Dash, which added improvements like QSound chips. Capcom even made a weak attempt to take on SNK's Neo Geo system with the Capcom Power System Changer in 1994, but only 11 games were released for it. We'll look at CPS-II and CPS III in a later issue, but in the meantime here are some of the best CPS-1 games from the late-Eighties to early Nineties. How many did you play? ✱

FORGOTTEN WORLDS 1988

SHOOTER

■ Capcom's very first CPS release proved that the developer meant serious business with its new hardware. It's an insanely pretty game that features magnificent-looking environments, lots of enemy sprites on the screen and some truly mesmerising bosses, some of which are several screens high in height. Mechanically, it's rather good as well with your flying spacemen being equipped with gigantic laser cannons that can be rotated around to give you full 360-degree movement (handy as enemies typically attack you from all sides). Defeated enemies drop Zenny (Capcom's fictional game currency) that can be used to buy various upgrades. Extremely popular, *Forgotten Worlds* was ported to numerous home systems, including Sega's Mega Drive.

GHOULS 'N GHOSTS 1988

PLATFORMER

■ This is how you make a great sequel. Capcom's follow-up keeps everything that made the first game so popular, but ranks everything up a notch, most notably in the graphics department. The visuals look wonderfully cartoon-like in places, with beautifully animated sprites and gorgeous-looking stages that range from haunted graveyards to fire-ravaged villages. As with *Forgotten Worlds*, *Ghouls* also features some highly memorable bosses, and although many of them aren't quite on the same impressive scale, they still pack a mighty wallop and can prove tough to defeat. Fortunately, Arthur is more than up to the task, having gained the ability to fire his various weapons upwards and downwards (more useful than it sounds) along with some swanky new armour that can be powered up to unleash devastating attacks. A sequel, *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, appeared on the SNES in 1991.

DYNASTY WARS 1989

SCROLLING FIGHTER

■ This two-player scrolling fighter is quite unusual as the entire game takes place on horseback. Based on the Japanese manga, *Tenchi wo Kurau*, Capcom's game has you fighting through eight distinct provinces based on various battles depicted in the novel. It was followed by a sequel called *Warriors Of Fate* (this time catering for three players at once) in 1992.

WILLOW 1989

PLATFORMER

■ Licensed from George Lucas' moderately successful film, *Willow* was one of two games Capcom created, with the other being an action RPG for the NES. While it features some enchanting sprite design and impressive bosses, *Willow* is a fairly conventional platformer, which probably explains why no one else bothered converting it to home systems.

UN SQUADRON 1989

SHMUP

■ Known as *Area 88* in Japan, this satisfying shooter is actually based on a Japanese manga with the same name. Unlike many other shooters from the period, *UN Squadron* features an energy bar that decreases as your ship takes damage. Numerous special weapons can be purchased at the start of each stage, which is handy as many of the bosses are real pigs to take down. ▶

STRIDER 1989

PLATFORMER

■ Spectacular is perhaps the best way to sum up Kouichi Yotsui's action platformer. The level design is exemplary, while the stages range from the snowy slopes of Siberia to the dinosaur-infested jungles of the Amazon. The bosses are a delight too, each one being more outlandish and outrageous than the last, including a gigantic metallic gorilla and a pirate atop a flying skiff. It's Strider himself who's the star of the show, though, being an incredible, athletic one-man army who uses his laser sword to cut through enemies like they are butter. It has a great Mega Drive conversion.

FINAL FIGHT 1989

SCROLLING FIGHTER

■ Once planned as a sequel to the original *Street Fighter*, *Final Fight* would go on to become one of the most popular scrolling fighters of its era. It's essentially a game about crowd control, with you ideally teaming up with a friend to pummel, kick and grapple the scum of Metro City in search of the mayor's missing daughter. Each of the three available characters: Mayor Mike Hagger, Cody and Guy have their own distinct fighting styles and also have access to weapons that range from katanas to steel pipes.

1941: COUNTER ATTACK 1990

SHMUP

■ This is the third game in the *19XX* series, which first started with *1942*. It moves away from the Pacific Front of the earlier games to take place on the Western Front but it's otherwise business as usual with waves of planes to shoot down and various ground forces. While you can still loop-the-loop to avoid trouble it's also possible to create a lightning attack and you can pick up smaller ships to enhance your firepower. Only one port was available at the time for NEC's SuperGrafx.

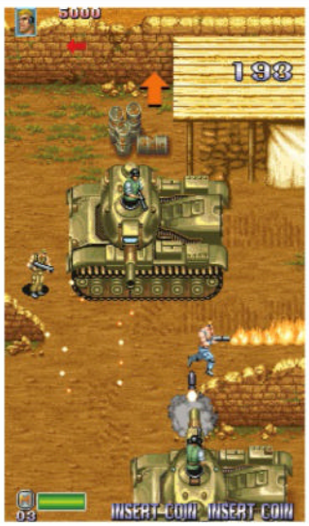
MEGA TWINS 1990

PLATFORMER

■ Known as *Chiki Chiki Boys* in Japan, *Mega Twins* is a charming, if rather conventional platformer that features colourful-looking levels, painfully cute bosses and some neat features that include magic bombs and bird hats that allow you to fly on certain stages. The twins themselves are fairly acrobatic, being able to cling onto and leap off vertical walls, while the game itself moves along at a fair old lick. Like many CPS games of the times it received numerous home ports, although interestingly, it never appeared on the SNES.

MERCS 1990

RUN-AND-GUN



■ It took Capcom five years to create a follow-up to *Commando*, but *Mercs* certainly didn't disappoint. Set in a more modern period, *Mercs* caters for three players (something that wasn't replicated on the home ports) and has some insanely powerful weaponry, including an assault rifle, flamethrower, and shotgun, all of which are a huge improvement on your base weapon. You also have access to the MegaCrush that acts as a smart bomb causing massive damage to anything on the screen. While many of the bosses look like conventional vehicles they take a huge amount of firepower to destroy, turning *Mercs* into a real credit eater. While it was ported to numerous systems at the time, the Mega Drive version is perhaps the best one as it features a brand-new set of stages in its Original Mode.

MAGIC SWORD: HEROIC FANTASY 1990

PLATFORMER

■ Part platformer, part scrolling beat-'em-up, Capcom's *Magic Sword* sees you battling through a number of fantasy environments and dealing with dragons, orcs, skeletons and all manner of fantasy creatures in your quest to reach the top of a 50-floor tower. The key difference here, however, is that while it caters for two players you can receive additional help by rescuing locked-up prisoners who will then support you until you swap them for someone else or they take too much damage. It's a great conceit, so it's a shame only the SNES got a home port.

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CARRIER AIR WING 1990

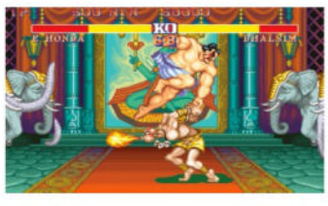
SHMUP

This spiritual successor to *UN Squadron* is quite unusual as it's one of the few CPS games that didn't receive a home conversion of any sort. This could be because it's a fairly average shoot-'em-up that plays extremely similarly to Capcom's earlier shooter. Indeed, some of the stages feel like carbon copies of *UN Squadron*, making *Carrier Air Wing* seem like an almost enhanced version of the classic shooter. It does score points for a great range of iconic ships, including the F-14 Tomcat and A-6E Intruder and we also love the fact that the officer who gives you mission briefings looks a lot like Sean Connery. It's not enough to stop *Carrier Air Wing* from rising above mediocrity, though.

STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR 1991

ONE-ON-ONE FIGHTER

Capcom's first sequel to *Street Fighter* proved to be so popular that the company cannibalised many of its older CPS boards in order to keep up with demand. The ground-breaking fighter introduced gamers to some of the genre's most iconic characters, including Blanka, Chun-Li and Zhangief and dramatically improves upon Capcom's original game, by adding combos (created accidentally by Capcom) and took two years to create. While it feels a little sluggish today there's no denying that it remains a tremendously satisfying fighter with a selection of characters that some people have spent decades perfecting. To counter the demand for the game (loads of hacked versions were released) Capcom released *Champion Edition* in 1991 and *Hyper Fighting* in 1992.



CREATING STRIDER

KOUICHI YOTSUI REVISITS HIS MOST POPULAR GAME

Strider was a group project between Capcom and Moto Kikaku, how did you become involved?

At the time I was working for Capcom's first project team when a manga, Famicom and arcade collaboration project came up. I was placed in charge of the arcade version by Tokuro [Fujiwara], who was my manager at the time. When I asked him why he had chosen me, his simple reply was: "You have really good negotiation skills." I'm guessing he was expecting a lot of meetings with people outside Capcom.

Why do _Strider_'s cutscenes feature multiple languages?

It was mainly because I wanted to give *Strider* a really exotic mood. When I was young there were no networks like we have today and it was only television that was able to show you all these exciting places from around the world. My impression was that the TV programmes imported from overseas were far more light-hearted and often featured adventures that saw explorers searching uncivilised jungles or going on ocean adventures. I was thinking: "There is a world out there that we cannot communicate within the language we know!" I wanted Strider to be able to run around an immense world that was filled with marvels, and I based it on those early TV shows.

Where did the ideas for _Strider_'s bosses originate?

Grandmaster Meio was actually inspired from an image I saw in JRR Tolkien's *The Lord Of The Rings*. I got the idea of Ouroboros from an old children's picture book that I used to enjoy, while Mecha Pon was simply my homage to the Toho movie character, Mechani-Kong. Lagoumechanic, on the other hand, was a little more convoluted. I saw it as an evolution of the dinosaurs on the Amazon level, but gave it the frame of a fowl. The attack where it reaches out at you with its huge claw represents a chicken scratching around for food. Finally, I based its head on the front of an F-16 fighter.

Why was _Strider_ such a showcase CPS game?

For me, I believe that an arcade game's destiny is that it has to represent the drama and the story of what's happening on screen as effectively as possible. Actually, there's often no other escape route for the staff who are working on it, so the best way of making your point is by using visual expression. I always want to capture the dramatic side of things when creating games, and the new CPS board really enabled me to do that. I knew that my options were limited and that if I wanted to get the best out of both the game and the system I had to be as thorough as possible. When playing games there really isn't anything else to compare them to, so you would make them, fundamentally, "all about the visuals".

Kouichi Yotsui interview first appeared in **Retro Gamer** issue 76.

CONVERTING GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

STE RUDDY ON PORTING CAPCOM'S CPS-1 HIT TO THE C64

How did you get to work on the conversion?

Software Creations was doing a fair bit of work for US Gold and it was really just the next game I got following on from *LED Storm*. It was my last C64 game as I was doing more and more NES work.

Had you played much of the game beforehand?

Sadly not. I'd played *Ghosts 'N Goblins* to death but I hadn't seen *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* in the wild until well into the development of the game – by which time I was quite good at it, although I'm not keen on paying to play!

How much help did you receive from Capcom?

We didn't get any, really. We received a board from US Gold and that was it. Fortunately, it was one with a debug mode, so I do remember Andy Threlfall [the graphic artist] spending quite a lot of time staring at the test graphic pages. Apart from that it was just a case of playing the game over and over. It was a hard job but, you know, someone had to do it!

What were the trickiest parts of the game to replicate?

Well, technically, it was a full-screen colour scroll. Chasing the raster to update the colour was always fun, with an optimised sprite multiplexor supporting some of the massive sprites that the game used. But, to be honest, just fitting the sodding thing into the memory of the C64 was probably the trickiest part of the port.

What aspects of the port are you most proud of?

Getting a playable interpretation of the arcade *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* using just a joystick.

And which parts do you wish you could improve?

The most annoying thing was the fact that we were rushed right at the end to get it out. This meant some silly bugs slipped through. I'd have loved just a couple more weeks to fix 'em.

How do you feel the port holds up today?

I think it's a pretty good interpretation of the arcade game. The graphics are good, it's playable and it has awesome music. That said, being a programmer, I look at it and think of all the things I could do better now.

Ste Ruddy interview first appeared in *games™* issue 197.

THE KING OF DRAGONS 1991

SCROLLING FIGHTER

This fantasy-based, scrolling action game is clearly a dry run for Capcom's excellent *Dungeons & Dragons* games, which would appear on the CPS-2 system. Up to three people can play at once and five playable characters are available, including a Dwarf and Elf. Each hero has different attributes so the Dwarf has superb attack power with poor range, while the Elf is the complete opposite. The 16 available levels represent virtually every fantasy environment you can think of and typically finish with a ferocious battle against mayors that range from dragons to armoured orcs. Interestingly, only the SNES received a port of the game. While it only caters for two players it remains a decent alternative.

THREE WONDERS 1991

VARIOUS

This interesting offering from Capcom actually consisted of three completely different games. *Midnight Wanderers: Quest For The Chariot* is a fun, but rather difficult run-and-gun that has you controlling the Hobbit Lou (and his friend, Silva, in co-op mode) as he searches for his friend, Sena. The animation throughout is of an incredibly high standard, while there are plenty of power-ups to discover.

Next up is *Chariot: Adventure Through The Sky*, which continues the adventures of Lou and Silva and follows on directly from the first game (they've got the chariot, now see?). It's a fairly conventional *Gradius*-styled shmup that looks pretty, but doesn't really push the genre in any way.

The final offering is *Don't Pull*, a puzzle game in the style of *Pengo* that has nothing in common with the two other games. While the music is a little too twee for our tastes, the game itself is great fun with a large number of single-screen stages to clear.

CAPTAIN COMMANDO 1991

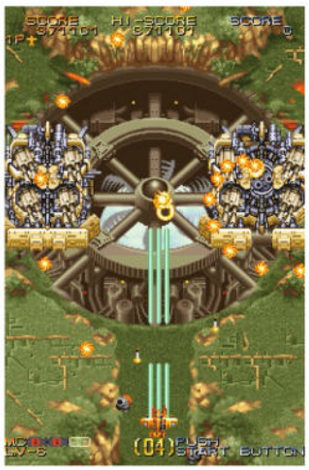
SCROLLING FIGHTER

Scrolling fighters were immensely successful in arcades, so it's little surprise that Capcom made so many of them to capitalise on that popularity. *Captain Commando* stars Capcom's original mascot, who has teamed up with a motley team of bizarre characters, including a baby in a power suit. It's extremely similar to Capcom's earlier scrolling fighters, but includes things like dashing and guns and allows up to four players to compete at once. It was eventually ported to the PlayStation and SNES.

KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND 1991

SCROLLING FIGHTER

Capcom's next action scroller is loosely based on King Arthur and the Knights Of The Round Table and lets you play as Lancelot, Perceval and King Arthur himself. Each character has his own strengths and weaknesses, with Arthur being the most balanced and they gain more powerful armour as they level-up in power. The game is otherwise similar to most other Capcom scrolling fighters, but does have a far bigger focus on blocking attacks with the aim of wearing down your opponent and using the powerful counterattacks the game offers, which adds some much needed strategy.



VARTH: OPERATION THUNDERSTORM 1992

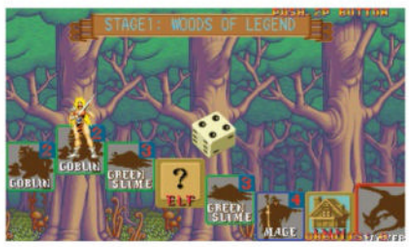
SHMUP

This average shmup from Capcom feels very much like a missing *19XX* game, albeit one set in the future. While it features similar waves of enemies and the familiar sets of red planes that must be shot down to earn power-ups, it sets itself apart by having sporadic bosses, sections that occasionally stop scrolling, three distinct weapons and useful pods that can be used to strategically block enemy bullets. It had no ports at the time, but eventually appeared on *Capcom Classics Collection Vol 2* and later Capcom compilations.

QUIZ & DRAGONS: CAPCOM QUIZ GAME 1992

QUIZ GAME

This interesting take on the quiz genre takes place in the world of Capconia and requires the four available heroes to battle various mythical creatures in order to save Capconia's Knowledge Tree. Taking place on a board, dice move the players around and each round typically ends in a question as the heroes battle numerous mythical monsters. While the original game features general knowledge questions an update for *Capcom Classics Collection Vol 2*, added a set of Capcom-based questions.



CADILLACS AND DINOSAURS 1993

SCROLLING FIGHTER

This was the second game to use Capcom's enhanced CPS board, the CP System Dash, which is essentially a CPS-1.5. Based on the popular comic book *Xenozoic Tales*, it's a graphically impressive brawler that includes neat mechanics like being able to use team attacks and the ability to use a variety of firearms and throwing weapons along with the typical melee options the genre offers. Dinosaurs are rampant throughout the game (one stage has you avoiding gigantic feet as foes swarm you on all sides) either acting as allies or foes and even the titular Cadillac pops up at one point, allowing you to drive through enemies as if they were paper.

THE PUNISHER 1993

SCROLLING FIGHTER

More CPS Dash-based action; this time based on the popular Marvel comic. It has brilliant, comic-style presentation and is an exceptionally brutal game with plenty of weapons for the Punisher and Nick Fury to use and has a surprisingly deep combat system. A cut-down port was released on the Mega Drive by Sculptured Software and now sells for hundreds of pounds.

SATURDAY NIGHT SLAM MASTERS 1993

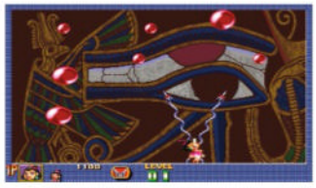
WRESTLING

This entertaining CPS Dash wrestling game is most notable for featuring *Final Fight*'s Mike Haggar as a playable character. It's a surprisingly deep game with an array of special moves and the ability to fight both in and outside of the ring. While the single-player mode is perfectly entertaining it's the Team Battle Royale that proves to be the most fun. Known as *Muscle Bomber: The Body Explosion* in Japan, it was ported to the SNES and FM Towns Marty.

PANG! 3 1995

PLATFORMER/PUZZLE

The third *Pang!* game is let down slightly by its horrible digitised pseudo-3D characters that take away a lot of the charm that made the earlier games popular. It's still good fun and adheres to the classic mechanics of the earlier games so you can team up with a friend to clear the screen of bubbles (which split into smaller ones when they get hit). Each character has their own unique abilities and the game dispenses with the world-travelling theme of earlier titles, instead setting the action in a large art gallery where you save numerous famous paintings.



80

Haunting Starring Polterguy

HOME IS WHERE THE HORROR IS

RETROREVIVAL

» MEGA DRIVE » 1993 » ELECTRONIC ARTS

In my humble opinion, horror games have been totally wrong for decades. Most of them involve stressing about managing limited resources, running from utterly grotesque creatures and experiencing terrifying jump scares. It's all just a bit masochistic, isn't it? I'd much rather take some sadistic delight in supplying the scares, and that's probably why I enjoy *Haunting* so much. You're cast in the role of Polterguy, a teenager who died in a skateboarding accident – an accident that wouldn't have happened if Vito Sardini hadn't cut corners in manufacturing to make a few extra bucks. His lawyers got him off the hook, so now you're out for revenge.

Of course, you can't do anything to Sardini directly, but you can possess household objects to terrify him out of his home – and since birds of a feather flock together, you also get to frighten his equally odious wife and kids. You can make the carpets bleed, fling knives everywhere, open up fiery pits in the floor and more, with plenty of different animations for most traps. Soon enough, you'll get the knack of scaring the contemptible clan towards the exits, and you'll need to as your time is limited by your Ecto – you can recover some with successful scares, but if you run out completely you'll be warped to dangerous dungeons to pick up more.

Haunting certainly isn't a perfect game – the scare animations eventually become repetitive, and controls and collision in the dungeon sequences feel a bit loose. Even so, the unique concept is enough to carry it a long way, and it's really a wonder that nobody has tried to elaborate on it in the decades since it launched. I think of the kinds of torture that I could inflict with the benefit of modern hardware, and I get a little giddy at the prospect of it all. Whether it's an official sequel from EA or a spiritual successor, someone really needs to make it happen. ✱

ULTIMATE GUIDE

Stunt Race FX

AS THE SECOND GAME TO UTILISE THE SUPER FX CHIP, STUNT RACE FX PUSHED THE SNES TO THE ABSOLUTE LIMIT IN ITS PURSUIT OF POLYGONAL THRILLS. HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CLASSIC RACER, PLUS AN INTERVIEW WITH CHIEF PROGRAMMER GILES GODDARD

WORDS BY JAMES TOCCHIO

[SNES] In Night Cruise, hit all the Star Fox signs and an Arwing flies into view!

[SNES] A few races feature dynamic changes from day to night, or fog which slowly clears.

In the early Nineties, the British game studio Argonaut Software invented something special, the Super FX chip, a Reduced Instruction Set Computer (RISC chip), which acted as a coprocessor on the Graphics Support Unit of select Super Nintendo game cartridges. The Super FX chip importantly allowed the primarily 2D sprite-based Super Nintendo to effectively render 3D polygons.

During development of the Super FX chip, Argonaut was simultaneously working to create the first game that would utilise this new technology. *Star Fox* (1993) was a technical marvel, and a masterpiece of the 16-bit era. It demonstrated the surprising 3D capability of the SNES and Super FX chip, sold over 4 million copies, re-popularised the rail-shooter genre, and spawned seven sequels over the next 25 years.

Development on the second Super FX chip game began just after the release of *Star Fox* when someone at Nintendo EAD/Argonaut floated the idea of a Super FX chip *Mario Kart*. Easier said than done. The proposed racing game would require rendering of a full 3D track, several 3D cars, obstacles, and effects, all made up of rendered polygons. Super FX chip or not, the SNES could only do so much, and development of Argonaut's new racer quickly became a balancing act between graphical fidelity and technical performance.

The result of this tightrope walk was *Stunt Race FX* (*Wild Trax* in Japan), a 3D racing game with mind-blowing graphics, and a sense of playfulness not often found in the racing genre. But *Stunt Race FX* is not the fastest racing game, nor the best-looking game, nor is it the most inventive or technically sound SNES game. What it is, is greater than the sum of its parts.

Stunt Race FX is not a typical racing game. While it features traditional racing elements, such as timed laps which are run simultaneously against competitors, it also presents interesting stylistic choices and unconventional game mechanics.

At the time of its release, the game's graphics were a revelation. On the starting grid of the very first race, you can feel that you've stepped into a future version of the happy perfection that was the aesthetic heart and soul of so many racing games of the Nineties. Bright polygonal hills of shimmering grass stretch into the distance. A forest sits peacefully on the horizon. The sky is blue. The clouds are fluffy. The anthropomorphic cars are splashed in the bright paint of primary colours. They have bright, expressive eyeballs and jovial

» [SNES] Environmental hazards are everywhere. Fly off this half-pipe and it's a watery game over.

"SOMEONE AT NINTENDO EAD/ ARGONAUT FLOATED THE IDEA OF A SUPER FX CHIP MARIO KART. EASIER SAID THAN DONE"

ULTIMATE DRIVING MACHINES

GET IN, BUCKLE UP, AND HOLD ON

F-TYPE

■ There are four main vehicles in *Stunt Race FX*, each with its own personality and distinct driving characteristics. The F-Type is a Formula 1-style racer with tight controls and blistering top speed. His body is weak, however, so skilled driving is key to staying out of the pits.

COUPE

■ The all-rounder of the four, Coupe is a classic two-door hot hatch with medium acceleration, medium top speed, and medium steering. Drivers will enjoy her penchant for drifting. Incidentally, the Japanese version's manual notes that Coupe is the only one of the vehicles that's female.

4WD

■ With fast acceleration and a durable body, 4WD is a monster truck with a somewhat tame personality. This makes him easy for beginners, and one of the more fun vehicles to drive. His heavy weight and huge tires keep him planted firmly to the road.

2WD

■ The unlockable fourth vehicle, 2WD is a motorcycle with the highest top speed in the game and a control methodology that's all about balance. Pressing L or R will cause 2WD to lean left and right, allowing for incredible cornering. He's tricky, but very fast and fun.

THE FUTURE OF RACING

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE SUPER FX CHIP

3D GRAPHICS AT HOME

■ Prior to games like *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race FX*, real polygonal 3D graphics were found primarily in arcades. *Stunt Race FX* was one of the first racing games to feature advanced 3D graphics on a home console, impossible without the Super FX chip.

POLYGONY DIGITAL

■ Like *Virtua Racing*, the Sega arcade game from 1992, polygonal vehicles gave *Stunt Race FX* a sense that real, mechanical things were happening on the screen. The way cars traversed the real, 3D environment was something most had never seen before.

A BLEND OF 2D AND 3D

■ The Super FX chip was adept at making the most of both 3D polygonal graphics, and 2D sprites. In *Stunt Race FX*, both are used. Look closely at the cars to find the rotating parts of their wheels and the vehicles eyes are in fact not polygonal at all.

DESTRUCTIBLE MODELS

■ A charming aspect of collisions in *Stunt Race FX* is made possible by the FX chip's polygon crunching. Cars hit a wall and rebound, sending their parts rubber-banding away in all directions before they snap back into place. Crash too much, and they simply go flying.

DEVELOPER Q+A

A FEW WORDS WITH STUNT RACE FX PROGRAMMER GILES GODDARD

***Stunt Race FX* was the next game to utilise the Super FX Chip, after *Star Fox*. How did the experience of creating *Star Fox* influence *Stunt Race FX*?**

During *Star Fox*, we were ironing out the bugs of the chip while making the game, so by the time we started *Stunt Race FX* most of the bugs had been fixed. The idea was to make a sort of Super FX chip *Mario Kart*. I didn't really have a clue what I was doing, so I was making it up as I went along.

What benefits did the Super FX chip offer?

Because the FX chip (which we called the MARIO chip then) was a very good general purpose RISC chip, you could do things it wasn't really designed for, and we were still discovering new things it could do. We realised that the chip was good at scaling and rotating bitmaps, so we turned the [*Stunt Race FX* vehicles'] wheels and eyes into sprites instead of using polygons, which saved us a lot of draw time. One of the things I was quite proud of (oddly enough) is the water drops that appear on the screen when you go through water. That was something I knew the chip could theoretically do fast, but I had to figure out how to code it efficiently.

The game's different vehicles all have very distinct handling. How was this achieved?

I made the prototype as a blank slate when it came to the physics. A single car on a flat track with no UI and nothing slowing the chip down. It was a lovely 20-30fps and allowed me to add all sorts of physics to get different handling. I had a simple way to edit the parameters in real-time without any constraints, so we pushed them way beyond what was 'realistic'. For example, I discovered that if you put the centre of gravity under the ground it acts as a keel of a boat and helps to keep the car upright, so I used that for the bike because I hadn't found a good way to keep a two-wheel vehicle upright.

What features were cut during development?

We might have talked about a four-player mode, but two-player was already pushing the hardware. You're drawing twice as much, and we were already maxing out the framerate in single-player mode. We had to use every trick to get it near acceptable – lower res shapes, simpler tracks, closer draw distance, letterbox screens. I think I hated two-player mode because it felt like there was hardly any game left after all the hoops we had to jump through.

Shigeru Miyamoto is credited as producer. Do you recall any input from the Nintendo legend?

I think [giving the cars] eyes may have been his idea. I could be wrong. Everything looks better with eyes.

***Stunt Race FX* sold over a million copies. Are you proud?**

My tendency is to see the flaws in the games I worked on. But hearing from people who grew up playing my games, and some of them being a person's favourite does make me very proud. People enjoying what we make is what really matters most.

"STUNT RACE FX RUNS AT ABOUT 10 TO 15 FRAMES PER SECOND, A FACT WHICH WE ALL INTELLECTUALLY RECOGNIZED AND UNDERSTOOD WHEN THE GAME RELEASED IN 1994, AND ONE WHICH WE ALL HAPPILY IGNORED"

» [SNES] Each championship has a bonus race in which you drive a tractor trailer.

physics which give them each their own effervescent personality.

The flag drops and you're off, racing through a paradise of varied tracks. One is comprised of elevated tubular half-pipes, like a water slide which rises high amongst the clouds and plummets down into a glass tunnel under the waves. Another track has you careering on the razor's edge of a desert canyon. Mesas loom in the distance as your wheels skirt the chasms to left and right. Another track along a metropolitan highway dazzles the night sky with distant pinpoints of light. A passenger jet screams by overhead, impossibly low as you jockey for position. Lit billboards streak past as you apex a corner mere inches from the guardrail. Was that Mario? Kirby? Fox McCloud? Your friends are all here.

Stunt Race FX runs at about 10 to 15 frames per second, a fact which we all intellectually recognised and understood when the game debuted in 1994, and one which we all happily ignored. Emotionally, we didn't give a damn. It just didn't matter. This was three-dimensional racing. This was the future, and we were lucky enough to be living it.

The game devs at Argonaut and Nintendo EAD weren't so tolerant. They knew early in the game's development that *Stunt Race FX* would be a demanding beast. To squeeze maximum performance out of the hardware, they relied on every trick in the book. Lower-resolution shapes, shorter draw distances, simpler track designs. They even ran the game in what was essentially 'windowed mode' in both single-player and multiplayer.

When we spoke with the game's chief programmer, Giles Goddard, for the developer Q&A portion of this piece, he told us that, in some ways, *Stunt Race FX* posed an even greater technical challenge than *Star Fox*. "We wanted more complex tracks, but we were very much fill-rate limited by the FX chip, so drawing the track alone was taking up a huge chunk of our frame time," he said. "We kind of cheated with *Star Fox* and drew dots instead of ground polygons, and that freed the chip up to draw more enemies, etc."

WELCOME TO DRIVING SCHOOL

I'M THE STIG, PAY ATTENTION

CHOOSE THE RIGHT CAR

■ The characteristics of the cars are crafted to suit certain types of players. 4WD is most durable and easiest to control for beginners; Coupe is a solid all-rounder for average players; and F-Type is a precision machine for more advanced racers. Choose wisely.

DAMAGE CONTROL

■ During the race, crashing into objects, walls, or other cars will cause your car's Damage Meter to fill. When it becomes full, the car explodes! Minimise your damage by staying in control and collect repair power-ups along the way.

MID-AIR BALANCING

■ Veterans of *Excitebike* will know the importance of balance, and it's no different in *Stunt Race FX*. To carry speed after landing from a jump, tilt the car backward or forward in mid-air using the up and down arrows of the d-pad.

HIT THE BOOST

■ Natural aspiration is cool, but have you ever driven a turbo? You will in *Stunt Race FX*. These cars are turbocharged and come with a boost gauge. Collect boost power-ups throughout the race and smash the Y button for a sudden burst of speed.

KYOTO DRIFT

■ The driving technique known as drifting, in which a driver controls a car through oversteer and a loss of traction, became popular in Japan in the Seventies. To drift in *Stunt Race FX*, press the L or R button together with left or right on the d-pad.

» [SNES] Keep your eyes open for some old friends. Pictured: Mario, Kirby, and Fox.

» [SNES] Without practice, expect to see this screen a lot…

» [SNES] Stunt Race FX's physics really come into play when using a tracks jumps. Careful now.

But you couldn't cheat with *Stunt Race FX*. The racetracks needed to be rendered, raced upon, not flown over. When it reached the limits of optimisation, it did its best to turn the game's performance issues into, if not an asset, then at least a mitigated liability. In this way, *Stunt Race FX* became something unusual; a racing game which wasn't all that concerned with going fast. Instead of speed, physics became the hook.

"By the time we had several cars driving around a track with effects and a UI," says Giles, "we were a long way from the smooth 20fps of the prototype. But I hadn't built any of the physics with framerate independence in mind, so the physics started behaving oddly. We decided to lean into that instead of trying to fix it. This gave the cars some personality – as if they were alive and struggling to keep themselves together."

It worked. The game's physics-based controls are rich and deep, effectively utilising the game's slower framerate to give the player a chance to see, feel, and understand what's happening with the car's suspension, and then react accordingly. Like no other 16-bit era racing game, you can feel the weight of these cars as they bounce over hills. They rise and fall, their springs and tires compress and rebound, they lose and gain traction with the help and hindrance of gravity and mass.

Stunt Race FX's unique gameplay and wonderful visuals are accompanied by an infectious soundtrack by Shinobu Amayake. Amayake's game credits are limited (she left Nintendo soon after completing work on *Stunt Race FX* to work at Yamaha and then established her own music production company in 2006), but her work on *Stunt Race FX* is an under-appreciated gift.

And it may be that term, under-appreciated, which is the legacy of *Stunt Race FX*. The game sold 1 million copies, a huge accomplishment, but compared to the 4 million sold by its FX chip predecessor, *Star Fox*, and the 8.7 million sold by its original inspiration, *Super Mario Kart*, it's clear that *Stunt Race FX* just couldn't keep up. Its reception has been even more lukewarm in the modern era. The game was added to Nintendo Switch Online in 2019, and there's no lack of online commentary bemoaning the game's sub-standard framerate.

Still, *Stunt Race FX* is something special to those that played it in 1994. It was new, exciting, and different. It was cute and yet challenging, technically limited and yet a stunning glimpse at the potential future of 3D videogames. More than anything, though, *Stunt Race FX* was (and remains) a bright and happy ride through a rich and cheerful world, a fun place to be at any framerate. ★

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Altered Beast

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1988 » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA

You were enjoying your first play of Sega's new arcade game immensely. The graphics look great and although the combat is a little clunky, it is still satisfying punching and kicking enemies to death. After defeating a white wolf a small orb is left in its wake, which you hastily grab. As you hear the word "power-up" boom out, your on-screen avatar grows in size and your attacks become stronger, leading you to greedily seek out any more white canines that might be heading your way. However, when you snag your third orb, you don't grow at all, instead you're taken to a fiery transformation scene where your heroic warrior morphs into a dangerous, fireball-flinging werewolf. It's a brilliant sequence that you still get a kick out of watching today.

BIO

Altered Beast debuted in Japanese arcades in 1988 and instantly made a spectacle thanks to its distinctive Greek setting, over-the-top transformations and memorable bosses. A solid money-spinner for Sega, it made its way to home systems and was a pack-in game with many Mega Drives. Despite its popularity, only two sequels have ever been released, *Altered Beast: Guardian Of The Realms* for the Game Boy Advance and *Altered Beast* for PS2, both of which were poorly received.

MORE CLASSIC ALTERED BEAST MOMENTS

Head Flinger

There's some grotesque oddities to be found in *Altered Beast* and the boss at the end of the first stage is a great example. He's a gigantic, fleshy-looking mass of body parts that constantly bombards you with respawning heads. Ugh.

We're Just Acting

As the credits to *Altered Beast* roll it's eventually revealed that all the characters and monsters in the game are just actors and they're simply making a movie. They even all get together for a few beers after the performance wraps.

A Truly Mega Conversion

Home conversions could be hit and miss, but the Mega Drive version of *Altered Beast* felt head and shoulders above all the versions of the game that your mates had. After all, Sega felt it was good enough to package with the machine.

Flying High

While all the beast transformations are particularly memorable, the dragon form is easily our favourite. In addition to looking cool and firing lightning, you can fly around the screen, which greatly opens up how the game plays.

THE EVOLUTION OF colin mcrae rally

INSPIRED BY SEGA RALLY AND ENDORSED BY A LEGENDARY DRIVER, COLIN MCRAE RALLY IMPRESSED ON THE PLAYSTATION AND INFORMED A LONG LINE OF SEQUELS. FORMER CODEMASTERS CREATIVE CHRIS SOUTHALL EXPLAINS HOW THE SERIES EVOLVED

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

» [PlayStation] Crossing streams in *Colin McRae Rally* doesn't affect your speed much, and it's good fun!

» Chris Southall now heads up Sumo Leamington, which recently launched a multiplayer karting game – see sumo-digital.com/leamington

» [PlayStation] Before you race in *Colin McRae Rally* it's worth attending Rally School to learn the basics.

In the Eighties, computer games required replay value to sell and coin-ops had to keep players' games short to be profitable, so it stands to reason that the earliest attempts at 3D rally games for PCs differed from their arcade equivalents. Take the 1988 PC title *Lombard RAC Rally*. It was hardly realistic, but it replicated actual courses and entire seasons. The 1989 coin-op *Big Run*, by comparison, was *Out Run* with rally cars.

By 1996, console games had a foot in both camps. They required longevity, but they were also expected to provide an arcade-like experience. This explains the thinking of a Codemasters team whose project took inspiration from both arcade and PC rally titles, as former Codemasters coder Chris Southall remembers. "A lot of us on the team were big *Sega Rally* fans," Chris notes. "We had a Saturn in the office with one of those early steering wheels, and we played a lot of *Sega Rally* at that point. There was another game on PC that we spent a lot of time playing called *Network Q RAC Rally Championship*. It was quite hardcore with long end-to-end special stages, and we referenced that as well. We really just looked at all of the games that were out there. At that point, the strategy at Codemasters was very much around finding a name and attaching a game to it, so that was an inspiration for *Colin McRae Rally* as well."

» [PlayStation] Dense forests and dirt tracks are typical of the environments found in *Colin McRae Rally*.

Before securing the popular rally driver for their game, foundations were laid for not just it but also a Formula 1 racing title, and this required a division of labour. Those that remained working on Codemasters' rally title were then sent out to do research. "Before we started the game, a few of us in the design department were working on 3D vehicle physics," Chris recalls. "That then became *TOCA* and *Colin McRae Rally*; we split the team up at that point. When we were just starting to work on *Colin McRae Rally*, Richard Darling sent us to a rally school, where we all drove cars around a forest stage. The point of that was that we wanted to do something that was an authentic rally experience for the hardware of the time, even though it was going to be an arcade-y game."

> "WE WANTED TO DO SOMETHING THAT WAS AN AUTHENTIC RALLY EXPERIENCE FOR THE HARDWARE OF THE TIME, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS GOING TO BE AN ARCADE-Y GAME"
> **CHRIS SOUTHALL**

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: NOTABLE SPIN-OFFS 2001-2005

COOL COLIN MCRAE GAMES TO PLAY ON THE GO

COLIN MCRAE RALLY

Quite wisely given its host hardware, this Game Boy Color release is a top-down affair. Its winding, hazard-strewn tracks scroll, but it otherwise plays like Codemasters' *Grand Prix Simulator*, insomuch as your car pivots around the centre of its front axle when you drift around bends.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0

A real step up from its portable predecessor, the Game Boy Advance version of *Rally 2.0* makes a decent attempt at depicting its challenges using 3D graphics. Its main mode spans six countries, while its arcade mode offers single-stage races, time trials and link cable multiplayer races.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005 PLUS

Like its PS2 counterpart, *Rally 2005 Plus* has an around the world career mode as its main attraction and an eight-player multiplayer mode, which is facilitated by WLAN. Its cars have a wealth of options, and can be damaged to the point where they conk out.

» [PlayStation] The icy roads found in the Scandinavian countries in *Colin McRae Rally* add a unique challenge.

» [PlayStation] Countries such as Kenya that weren't in the original game are showcased in *Colin McRae Rally 2.0*.

» [PlayStation] Multi-car races are a new feature in *Rally 2.0* that the original *Colin McRae* title lacks.

» [PlayStation] It's taken for granted these days, but getting mud spatter in *Rally 2.0* was a major undertaking.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
NOTABLE SPIN-OFFS 2007-2011

EARLY ENTRIES IN THE EXCELLENT DIRT FRANCHISE

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT

The career mode at *DiRT*'s core has you competing in tiered events to win the points required to unlock higher tier races. Different events feature different vehicles, with some having opponents and others having you drive solo with the aim of getting a quick time.

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2

Aside from its storyline, *DiRT 2* is differentiated by its five racing disciplines. Naturally, rally racing is one of these, with the others being multi-car rally-cross, aerodynamically aided vehicle racing, and heavyweight vehicle course and circuit-based events.

DIRT 3

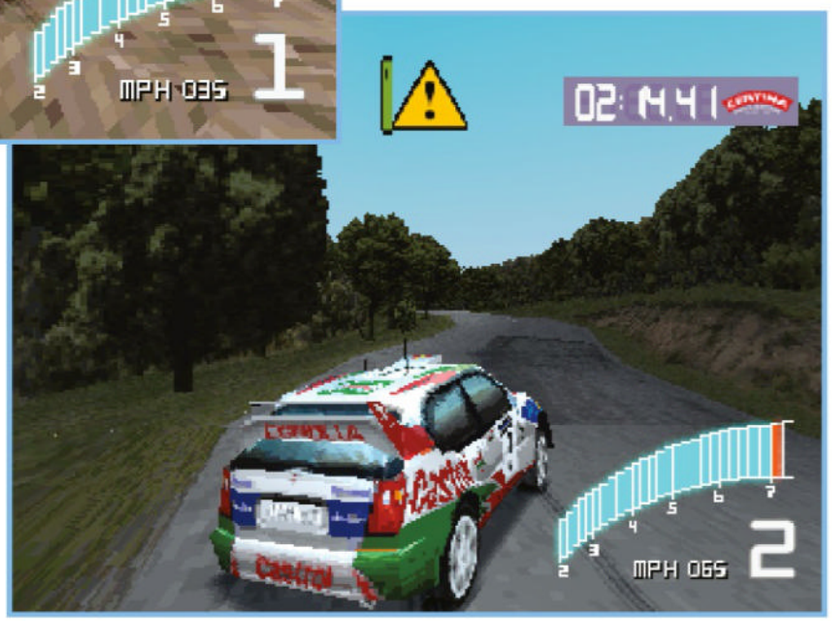
Although its modes are largely the same as its predecessor's, *DiRT 3* has a new mechanic where you gain Reputation Points in races. As these mount up, sponsors provide you with new vehicles. In terms of new modes, there are stunt-based and head-to-head challenges to enjoy.

The decision to strike this balance between simulation and coin-op-style gameplay was partially down to what was popular with the team's target audience. A second consideration was the technical limitations of their target console. "By the nature of the PlayStation, and the kind of the games that were on there, it didn't seem right to do a full sim," Chris reasons. "It also wasn't possible with integer point maths at that time. So we weren't going to have 25-minute stages or anything like that, but we were trying to make the environments feel realistic and we spent a lot of time modelling how loose surface friction works versus traditional tarmac. We modelled the tracks so that their profiles mattered, and being able to go off the track was part of the experience as well."

Just as important as the game's modelling was the look of its locations, which were based on those of the official World Rally Championship. As the internet and digital photography hadn't yet come of age, this required globetrotting and skilled artists. "We sent people to different locations to take reference. That was important," Chris emphasises. "One of my best friend's brother happened to live in Kenya, and that was one of the locations in the game, so we sent him around Kenya, driving and taking references, which he then sent back to us. Sometimes we would send people working on the track designs as well as artists. When they stood on the roads they got a better insight on how to construct the tracks in the game. Then on the other side, a lot of clever people in the art team optimised things and did as much with the textures as possible to get as much variation as we could."

As well as getting reference for *Colin McRae Rally*'s environments, the team working on the project got the star of their game and his co-driver into the studio to do voice recordings. The team also got pointers on the

» [PlayStation] It's snow joke when you're racing through Sweden in a blizzard.



» [PlayStation] You can badly damage your car in *Rally 2.0*, and the game depicts every bump and scratch.

> "I REMEMBER DOING A PRESS TOUR IN GERMANY WHERE EVERYBODY WAS DRIVING AROUND A KARTING TRACK. IT WAS RIDICULOUS, BECAUSE COLIN WAS JUST LAPPING ME"
>
> **CHRIS SOUTHALL**

implementation of their game's cars. "Both Colin McRae and Nicky Grist were pretty involved," Chris reviews. "I remember working on the Rally School mode, and I wrote a list of all the things that Colin needed to say. When he read them back you could tell he wasn't a voice actor! He also gave us advice on how the cars handled, and it was just really cool to understand that stuff. Nicky would do the pace notes, which were for every corner or bit of the track that you came to."

While *Colin McRae Rally* came together, a rival firm beat Codemasters to market with a PlayStation rally game of its own. But rather than worrying the *Colin McRae* team, it convinced them that their decision to pour time into modelling was the right one. "When *V Rally* was released we were in mid-dev on *Colin McRae Rally*," Chris recollects. "We didn't think they got the sliding/hand brake right, so in general we were reassured of where we were at on the handling model versus that. *Colin McRae Rally* was realistic enough rather than being a game that didn't really obey the laws of physics."

During pre-release marketing for *Colin McRae Rally*, Chris was reminded of the skill involved in racing real-life rallies by its leading man. Naturally, the game was far less demanding, but the experience reassured the coder about his team's focus on authenticity.

"I remember doing a press tour in Germany where everybody was driving around a karting track," Chris reflects. "It was ridiculous, because Colin was just lapping me. It was night and day how fast he was versus a normal human. Having that sort of connection was great. I mean you couldn't simulate it in an arcade-like game, but it was really important to have that and to have pulled it through into something that hung together for the player."

This last point was borne out by *Colin McRae Rally* selling in its millions on the PlayStation and PC. An online community subsequently grew out of the PC version's networked mode, which then fed into features chosen for a sequel. "We found that with the PC version of the first game having multiplayer over dial-up connections that people were setting up championships and playing together a lot," Chris points out. "I think the PC multiplayer was where the multi-car Arcade mode in *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* came from. We leant into it a little with its ▶

» [PlayStation 2] The muddy surfaces found in *Colin McRae Rally 3* can be hazardous but also allow for drifting.

» [PlayStation 2] Night driving is a recurring challenge in *Colin McRae Rally 3*'s challenging Japanese rally tracks.

» [PlayStation 2] The detail in *Colin McRae Rally 3*'s Australian course reflects the series moving from PS1 to PS2.

multiplayer stages as well, because you had ghost cars in those, although they were very much times-based."

Another difference between *Rally 2.0* and the original game was that initially you could only race in stages held in certain countries. The remaining nations featured in the game could only be unlocked by progressing through its Championship mode. "You wanted people to spend time with your game, and just giving everybody everything at the beginning wasn't necessarily the best thing to do," Chris explains. "Having people work to unlock content encouraged them to appreciate it more. It was about skill as well. If you had a later stage that was really tough, and you gave someone that on day one when they didn't have the skill then they weren't going to enjoy it. Whereas having players practice easier stages let you do more with the later track designs."

The follow-up's fresh features also included a Challenge mode, which unlike the main mode, involved a knockout tournament rather than a league. Although this option was new to *Rally 2.0*, it had actually been intended for the original game. "The first game was really good, but there was a load of stuff on the drawing board that we didn't manage to get into it," Chris reveals. "The different modes and challenges were some of those things. The Knockout mode was an obvious thing to have just from a player perspective, as some might not want to have an experience that was more drawn out. Someone who stopped playing the main mode because they were a bit stuck would also have thought it was great to explore the other modes."

One of these alternative challenges saw players racing in classic cars. The criteria for the selection chosen was partially driven by which would contrast *Rally 2.0*'s contemporary vehicles, but commercial considerations were also a factor. "Everyone on the team was a car geek, so it was just an obvious thing to have different categories like classics," Chris enthuses. "The selection of classic cars was a combination of what people liked and us wanting to have variety. Going back to the Mark II Escort meant you got a rear-wheel drive car versus a four-wheel drive Quattro with all the power that had. It was just interesting to have that variety.

> "EVERYONE ON THE TEAM WAS A CAR GEEK, SO IT WAS JUST AN OBVIOUS THING TO HAVE DIFFERENT CATEGORIES LIKE CLASSICS"
> **CHRIS SOUTHALL**

» [PlayStation 2] Chicanes found partway along courses are a new feature introduced in *Colin McRae Rally 3*.

It was also what we were able to use from a licensing perspective."

Restrictions of a more technical kind initially limited an aspect of *Rally 2.0*'s aesthetics, but thanks to clever coding, and encouragement from a Codemasters founder, a way was found to overcome them. "We just couldn't get dirt on the cars, but Richard Darling was adamant about it," Chris sighs. "He really pressed the programmers working on that stuff. They were very talented guys, and so they did some technical wizardry to get mud spatter happening on the cars. It sounds ridiculous these days, but it was quite technically challenging at the time."

More technical challenges followed as the success of *Rally 2.0* led to *Colin McRae Rally 3*. Unlike its predecessors, it was designed for the PS2, and learning to code for the powerful new system resulted in a more realistic game with fewer modes. "That probably came from a technical focus on getting the game engine stood up," Chris reckons. "We were writing our own game engines, and it was the jump to PS2. It took some of the engine guys quite a long time just to get polygons on the screen on the PlayStation 2. It was not super easy to program for out of the gate, even though it had a lot more horsepower than the PlayStation. So I think the focus there was naturally far more towards simulation."

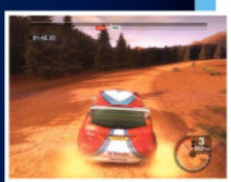
One addition to *Rally 3* was an upgrade system where performing well in rallies was rewarded with performance parts for your car. These were chosen for the player rather than them getting a choice, which made sense for a number of reasons. "I think that was really just to give simplicity to the upgrade path," Chris considers, "and to allow us to tune the

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
NOTABLE SPIN-OFFS 2012-2015
COMPELLING SUCCESSORS TO COLIN MCRAE RALLY

DIRT: SHOWDOWN

Although racing plays a part in *DiRT: Showdown*, there's more emphasis on damaging rival cars, pulling off stunts and generally showing off. Highlights include demolition derbies, races where a timer eliminates the slowest drivers and multiplayer capture-the-flag.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY



Designed for mobiles, this 2013 release is an adaptation of *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* rather than the original game. Aside from its touch-screen and tilt controls, this enhanced version of *Rally 2.0* differentiates itself from its inspiration with greatly improved visuals.

DIRT RALLY

Far more of a simulation than any previous *Colin McRae* or *DiRT* title, *DiRT Rally* is defined by its steep learning curve. Practice pays off, but there's always the thought that losing control will badly damage your car and your chances of getting a competitive time.

» [PlayStation 2] Flying over hills in *Colin McRae Rally 04* generally doesn't end well, so it's best not to risk it.

» [PlayStation 2] The Time Trials in *Colin McRae Rally 04* have ghost cars that act as pacemakers.

» [PlayStation 2] There's a mode in *Colin McRae 04* where you race in overpowered cars that were banned in the Eighties.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

NOTABLE SPIN-OFFS 2017-2020

RECENT RELEASES IN THE ENDURING DIRT SERIES

DIRT 4

More accessible than *DiRT Rally*, *DiRT 4* also stands out by generating rally courses based on the length and difficulty you specify. Other modes include multi-car rally-cross, buggy racing and truck events. You can buy and sell cars, and hire people to repair them.

DIRT RALLY 2.0

It's hard to imagine how *DiRT Rally 2.0* could be much more realistic or have many more features. The taxing sequel boasts 50 cars from the Sixties to the Noughties, global rally and rally-cross events, and weather that affects everything from visibility to road surfaces.

DIRT 5

Technically an off-road racer rather than a rally title, although *DiRT 5* does incorporate multi-car rally-cross events. Other disciplines on offer include stadium-based truck racing and off-road buggies. The game has seasons, and in winter you can go ice racing.

game to what the car was doing rather than having a wide variation due to different parts being equipped. If you put a huge engine into a Mini then you would have torn the drivetrain to pieces, and it wouldn't have been able to turn around corners. With each car there was a range through tuning it, but it was also important not to go outside the range of plausibility."

Judging by the response to *Rally 3*, its leaning towards simulation and linear upgrades were popular choices. Spurred on by this and a better understanding of the PS2, the team creating *Colin McRae Rally 04* incorporated real-world physics. "The physics were getting more advanced, and it was always down to authenticity, but with fun in there," Chris assesses. "It didn't change the ethos from the first game, which was that you were supposed to feel like you were rally driving. But our aim was still to have an accessible game that was realistic rather than being a sim. Because it was our second *Colin McRae* title on PS2 we had more time to develop things. Like the loose surface physics engine, where you had different grips when your wheels were spinning or not."

One other feature that there was time to develop for *Rally 04* was an Expert mode with a forced cockpit view. Another mode showcased insanely powerful cars, and two more focussed on 2WD and 4WD models. "It was fun for us for the sim to be locked into the cockpit view, because that gave you the most authentic feeling," Chris observes. "We spent a lot of time tuning the views behind the car, but actually sitting in the car was its own thing. With the massively overpowered banned Eighties cars, well you want to do things with videogames that aren't very possible in real life! Then there was a lot of affection for both the 2WD and 4WD groups, so those were just obvious modes to include."

A final feature of note in *Rally 04* was partly done just for laughs, although ironically the end result represented a serious racing challenge. This came in the form of a set of bonus cars,

» [PlayStation 2] In addition to more traditional rally cars, you get to drive SUVs in *Colin McRae Rally 2005*.

» [PlayStation 2] *Colin McRae Rally 2005*'s career mode has you working up leagues before racing Colin in the Dakar Rally.

» [PlayStation 2] The environments in *Colin McRae Rally 2005* include trees that you can knock the leaves off.

which included a Citroen 2CV and a Ford Transit Van. "I just think at that point it was appropriate," Chris remarks. "You wouldn't have put them in the first game probably, because people would wonder what the hell was going on. But by the fourth game the audience just thought it was fun, and it didn't make people question what kind of game it was. So I just think it was just a fun thing to be able to do."

As with the earlier titles, the highly rated *Rally 04* led to a sequel – *Colin McRae Rally 2005*. Chris didn't have a hands-on role on the project, but he took an interest in the fifth game in the series and approved of it pitting you against Colin McRae in one mode. "I don't know if people liked that or not, but it was an obvious idea to race Colin," Chris contemplates. "You were playing as Colin in *Colin McRae Rally 3*, where you were locked into racing in the Ford Focus, so it was an interesting idea to race against him in *Colin McRae Rally 2005*."

Other areas where *Rally 2005* improved on the earlier *Colin McRae* titles were with the customisation it allowed and its highly interactive environments, the latter of which compared favourably with the original PlayStation game that kicked off the series. "It was the same story with the rendering engine as it was with the physics engine – it was all written by us, and more things became possible as time went on," Chris highlights. "So things like the ability to change driver names and put them on the cars, and trees shaking and leaves falling on the vehicles. We couldn't do anything with the track sides other than 2D facing planes in the first game, but by the fifth game there was the capability to be able to do more with the environments."

Although *Colin McRae Rally 2005* was well received, its follow-ups partially and then completely dropped the Colin McRae name, and embraced other racing disciplines. Asked about *Colin McRae Rally*'s legacy, Chris recalls an anecdote and singles out *Rally 2.0* for praise. "I met this guy recently, and he was a big fan of *Colin McRae Rally*," Chris beams. "He claimed it saved him from crashing not long after he had started driving, because it was wet weather and he knew to react accordingly after playing the game. We spent a long time internally playing that, and it's always a good sign when you see your team playing something in their spare time that they're spending their whole life making. It was the same with *Colin McRae Rally 2.0*, but there was a lot of stuff in it that we had more time to finesse, so I would say that it's one of the best titles in the series, and it's absolutely still fun to play."

> "IT WAS FUN FOR US FOR THE SIM TO BE LOCKED INTO THE COCKPIT VIEW, BECAUSE THAT GAVE YOU THE MOST AUTHENTIC FEELING"
> **CHRIS SOUTHALL**

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HINATA
TEAM UP
TECHNIQUE

Rival Schools: United By Fate

THE SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

» RETROREVIVAL

» PLAYSTATION » 1998 » CAPCOM

One of the great things about getting into the PlayStation late is that there's loads of interesting games to unearth. Some I've discovered through reading about them in the magazine, while others have been thanks to friends and family. YouTuber Sean Seanson has also played a pivotal role in my PlayStation discoveries, thanks to his excellent channel.

While I was aware of *Rival Schools: United By Fate*, I'd owned the sequel on Sega's Dreamcast, I'd never actually played it, either on Sony's PlayStation or in the arcades. A recent video by Sean changed that and led to me purchasing the Japanese version of the game. While it's a little more difficult to navigate due to the large amounts of Japanese text, I'm so glad I picked it up, as it's not only significantly cheaper than the US version, but it's also tremendously fun.

If you're not aware of *Rival Schools*' pedigree, it's essentially a one-on-one team-based fighter featuring a bunch of competing school kids and teachers. Unlike Capcom's *Vs* games, you can't swap between partners at will, instead you get to choose your brawler between each new round. You can also summon them to perform a devastating Team Up Attack once you've accumulated enough Vigor.

It's these crazy attacks that really caught my attention in Sean's video and while they don't look anywhere near as spectacular as those in the Dreamcast sequel, they're still plenty of fun to execute. The game's director Hideaki Itsuno was keen to hit a 60fps target and this is achieved by simplifying the game's polygons and backgrounds. The end result is a highly stylised-looking fighter that really comes into its own when you pull off a Team Up Attack, which are as fun to watch as they are dangerous to your opponent's life bar.

While I've been too intimidated to try the bizarre-sounding single-player game with its dating sim mechanics, the standard Arcade mode has got its hooks well and truly into me. Thanks for the recommendation, Sean. ✱

THE MAKING OF THE THING

RELEASED IN THE EARLY NOUGHTIES, THE THING PROVED TO BE AN AMBITIOUS SEQUEL TO JOHN CARPENTER'S CULT EIGHTIES HORROR. KEY MEMBERS OF THE DEVELOPMENT TEAM RETURN TO THE SNOWY WASTES OF ANTARCTICA TO DISCUSS ITS CREATION AND NIGHTDIVE STUDIOS' INCOMING AMBITIOUS REMASTER

WORDS BY ROBERT ZAK

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** COMPUTER ARTWORKS
- **RELEASED:** 2002
- **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 2, PC, XBOX
- **GENRE:** ACTION HORROR

A medic, two engineers and a US marine who wouldn't look out of place as the bass player in a Noughties nu-metal band are fighting for their lives. Scuttlers – upside-down human heads with spidery legs attached – are swarming into the base from the deathly cold of Antarctica, while a vaguely human-shaped mass of engorged muscle shrieks as it's set alight by the engineer's flamethrower. The medic panics and begins to blindly fire off his pistol, and one of the engineers gets bitten by a Scuttler; he begins to convulse, and in a matter of seconds his arms drop off in a cloud of blood before being replaced by more vicious appendages, while his head morphs into a mutated, muscular maw.

You turn, ready to face the new threat that just seconds ago was your most invaluable ally, when suddenly you're faced with "Game Over. The Engineer Died". It turns out that the other engineer with you was mission-critical, and he's just been shot dead by the frenzied medic.

That's the big tension at the heart of the 2002 videogame sequel to John Carpenter's 1982 iteration of *The Thing*: dynamic, emergent scenarios arising from a forward-thinking system of trust, fear, and infection on the one hand, and the contrivances of linear early Noughties videogame design on the other. *The Thing* was filled with big, bold ideas, though for British developer Computer Artworks it was very much a continuation of ideas it had already begun exploring years before in a strange, psychedelic sci-fi game called *Evolva* – a squad-based shooter in which players controlled a team of GenoHunters capable of absorbing the DNA of those they kill to mutate themselves into new forms with new powers. "It was a squad-based game with a really interesting aesthetic," *The Thing* lead designer Andrew Curtis begins to tell us. "It was this crazy, slightly distorted world with alien characters, and a really fresh-looking alien landscape."

Beyond the obvious thematic similarities between *Evolva* and *The Thing* – a story about a hostile microorganism that brutally assimilates organisms it comes into contact with – another Computer Artworks project that caught the eye of Vivendi Universal was William Latham's Organic Art, a series of computer-generated artworks that combined bright colours with 3D shapes that seemed at the same time alien and human. This collection was released by

» [PC] Computer Artworks' previous game *Evolva* laid the genetic blueprint, *The Thing* assimilated it.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

EVOLVA (PICTURED)
RELEASED: 2000
PLATFORM: PC

THE THING
RELEASED: 2002
PLATFORM: PC, XBOX, PLAYSTATION 2

» [PC] From the frigid atmosphere to the deadliness of the outdoors, *The Thing* was a cold-feeling game.

Computer Artworks as a screensaver for Windows 95, and somehow caught the attention of Universal. "They saw we were experimenting with this organic art," Andrew recalls. "And someone there had the idea of combining these ideas and doing something with *The Thing*. So they came to us."

> "IT WAS THIS CRAZY, SLIGHTLY DISTORTED WORLD WITH ALIEN CHARACTERS, AND A REALLY FRESH-LOOKING ALIEN LANDSCAPE"
> ANDREW CURTIS

On the one hand, reviving *The Thing* was a risky move for Universal. The 1982 movie was not a commercial success, and while the VHS and DVD booms would help it get reappraised as an all-time classic over the years, from a publisher's perspective its popularity 20 years later was hard to gauge. What reassured the studio in the end, according to the game's director Mark Atkinson, was the fact that many of the core systems were ready to go from *Evolva*. "It was virtually the same engine in that we had all the bits, we had the 3D engine, we had physics, we had the squad-based play, we had all those character interactions," Mark says. "We could just come to them and say that we've got all this technology that we can feed into this new game."

Of course, *The Thing* was much more than a simple *Evolva* reskin, or a simple movie adaptation; its unique fear, trust, and infection systems were an extremely ambitious transfusion of the movie's themes into videogame form, while one of the few directives given by Universal was that the game should be a sequel to the movie, rather than a spin-off or adaptation as per the norms of the time.

Lead artist Ron Ashtiani lauded the freedom of working on a sequel. "*The Thing* was in a sweet spot, really, because at that point there hadn't been any more movies," says Ron. "The franchise had been dormant for quite a long time and as we know now, if you do anything *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter* or anything like that, you're massively bound by the weight of everything that's been done before."

So the game picks up soon after the catastrophic events of the 1982 movie.

» [PC] You can keep your squadmates alive, but you can't keep them from throwing up everywhere.

ANDREW CURTIS

■ Andrew has worked on numerous games, from *Uncharted* to *Killzone*, and is currently deep in VR, working as a director on *Meta Horizon Worlds*.

RON ASHTIANI

■ Ron has worked on dozens of games and TV shows since *The Thing*, has written several books, and is a board director at Steamforged Games.

» [PC] These little guys are the main enemy type throughout the game, and they're a right nuisance.

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR

BEING A SEQUEL, THE 2002 GAME HAS PLENTY OF CALLBACKS TO THE MOVIE. HERE ARE SOME YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS

BAD BLOOD

■ In a callback to one of the movie's most iconic scenes, Captain Blake and his squadmates need to do blood tests to gain the trust of Captain Pierce. In an even bigger callback, Blake says, "Now I'm going to show you what I already know," as he self-administers the blood test, which is exactly what Kurt Russell's RJ MacReady said in the movie.

CHILDS' FATE

■ At the end of the movie, only two survivors remain: Childs and MacReady. *The Thing* videogame answers questions about both of their fates, and unfortunately for Childs, it ain't a great one. Early in the game, you stumble upon the body of Childs, who has seemingly succumbed to the freezing cold (with MacReady's iconic whiskey bottle by his side).

MOVIE CAMEO

■ The mysterious body discovered by MacReady and Copper in the 1982 movie is that of a radio operator known only as Colin (who we learn more about in the 2011 prequel). Colin's bloodied corpse also appears early on in the game, technically making Colin the only character to feature in the original movie, the prequel and the game.

UNEARTHLY ORIGINS

■ One of the major revelations in the 1982 movie about the Thing's origin comes when MacReady discovers an ice block with its centre hollowed out in the Norwegian base, indicating that this is where the Thing was originally excavated. In the game, Blake stumbles upon the very same ice block.

THINGS, THEY ARE A'CHANGIN'

HOW THE CULT GAME IS BEING UPDATED

Nightdive Studios is working with original developers Mark Atkinson and Ron Ashtiani to not just remaster *The Thing*, but fix and redesign various elements of the original game. Here are some of the reasons Ron calls the remaster "*The Thing 1.5*".

ART ASSETS

■ Avid *The Thing* fan and environmental artist Joel Welsh was hired by Nightdive to give the environments more pop and align them better with their appearance in the movie. So expect to see tons of little details – from 'high voltage' signs, to radios on desks and pinball machines, right down to movie-accurate serial numbers on the sides of crashed helicopters.

SPECIAL MAPS AND SHADOWS

■ Graphics improvements are standard practice in Nightdive's world of remastering, but the introduction of special mapping gives Things a glossy, gory appearance that brings them much closer to Carpenter's 1982 movie.

DIFFICULTY AND BOSS REBALANCING

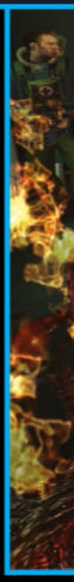
■ The 2002 game was notorious for some of its difficulty spikes and wonky boss fights later on, so expect to see some big changes in these areas, as Nightdive picked up on these areas while it was doing research.

IMPROVED CONTROLS

■ *The Thing*'s controls weren't its strong suit, especially on PC, where it took a post-release patch to enable a basic form of mouselook. Thankfully, those days are long gone, and the remaster has a modern control scheme whether you're playing with a gamepad or keyboard and mouse.

» [PC] There are few pleasures in gaming like watching AI enemies fight each other.

» [PC] The possibility that any of your squadmates might transform into a Thing captures the overwhelming air of paranoia from the movie.



» [PC] The latter parts of the game see a lot of long-range head-poppin'.

» [PC] A well-positioned squad, ready to plough down the mindless Gen Inc soldiers.

▶ Players are cast in the role of Captain JF Blake, a US Marine tasked with investigating the American and Norwegian bases in Antarctica, where the deadly extraterrestrial lifeform ran rampant. Blake's no MacReady (and Per Solli, whose only voice-acting credit to this day is Blake, is no Kurt Russell), though campily butch lines like, "Cover your ass. I'd hate to see you get an unwanted suppository," are in keeping with the game's deliberately more action movie tone.

We suggest to Andrew that the game feels to Carpenter's movie like what *Aliens* was to *Alien* – an action-oriented sequel that turns the solitary threat into a rampant swarming one, where the fear stems not from lack of means by which to fight the threat, but by the fact that the threats keep coming even as your ammo starts running dry. "Yeah, that was actually the inspiration for the story," he confirms. "We knew it was going to be action horror, we knew there were going to be a lot more gunfights. I loved science-fiction, so *Aliens* was a huge thing for me." To that end, Gen Inc, the corporation in the game that attempts to harness the capabilities of the titular

» [PC] Things don't like fire, and luckily flamethrowers are less prone to malfunction than in the movie.

» [PC] The blizzard outside is just as dangerous as the enemies inside (and, well, outside).

» [PC] A brave stand-off alongside a medic who is sadly doomed to either die or disappear.

"WE KNEW IT WAS GOING TO BE ACTION HORROR, WE KNEW THERE WERE GOING TO BE A LOT MORE GUNFIGHTS. I LOVED SCIENCE-FICTION, SO ALIENS WAS A HUGE THING FOR ME"
ANDREW CURTIS

organism, is "very much inspired by" the Weyland-Yutani corporation.

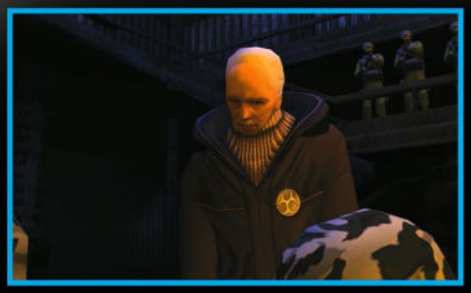
Team Fortress and *Half-Life* deathmatches were a big thing at the Computer Artworks office, which fed into *The Thing* splitting its squadmates into medics, engineers, and assault classes. Beyond that, each squadmate in *The Thing* has their own threshold for what they can take. If a squadmate sees the body of someone who has been viciously disembowelled, they might throw up or, worse, start panicking, at which point you need to either escort them away from the area or inject them with adrenaline. Once their panic gets too high, they might have a full paranoid flip–out and start shooting at everyone around them, forcing you to put a bullet in their head.

Some people will refuse to follow you if you don't give them a weapon and ammo, others can be coerced into cooperation by having a gun pointed at them (though they'll resent you for it). Most intriguingly of all, any squadmate might get infected with the Thing virus when hit by a Thing-creature, causing them to quickly transform (and emit an unearthly roar that does a great job of imitating Bennings-Thing's iconic cry from the movie). Sometimes these transformations would happen after an intense battle, with the relief of victory making way for a fresh terror as that medic who'd aided you through several encounters is suddenly coming for your throat.

Impressive though this system was, Andrew wanted even more initially. Spurred on by the incredible power promised by PlayStation 2 interactive demos, he envisioned that you could continue amassing squadmates throughout the game, with the potential for cool things like large-scale infection outbreaks and more detailed trust mechanics, but he quickly saw the issues with this vision. "For the amount of characters that we implemented across the story that would have become very difficult to manage," he concedes. "You can imagine going into your final boss fight at the end of the game with like 30 squadmates, it would have been insane!"

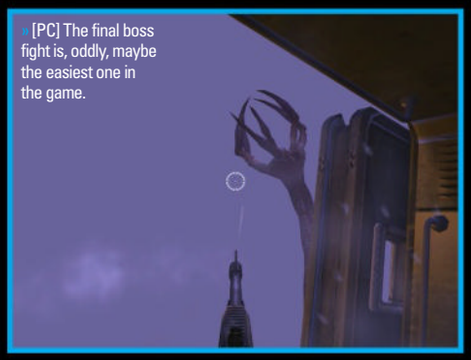
Also, it transpired that the PlayStation wasn't some super-console with limitless resources, so the game's systems had to be pared back and integrated into what was fundamentally a linear game. "Back then games usually had a linear flow, so if you're having optional characters who may or may not be coming or going, or getting infected or not, then suddenly you've got this massively branching narrative," Ron points out. "This was too much for the PS2, and too much complexity for such a small team to implement."

The dynamism and scripted aspects of the game collided: for instance, many squadmates were subjected to scripted infections, which meant that even if you used blood test kits on them, they could pass the tests only to transform into Things at a scripted point just moments later. In the end, the squad dynamics petered out towards the late game, and squadmates were a bit too disposable for the player to build any kind of attachment with them; but when it all gelled, the range of scenarios that the infection and fear systems kicked up was pure action horror havoc. It squeezed the full intensity of a multiplayer mode like Horde ▶



» [PC] John Carpenter provided the likeness and voice for the scientist Dr Faraday.

» [PC] Captain Blake isn't exactly Kurt Russell, but he gets the job done.



» [PC] The final boss fight is, oddly, maybe the easiest one in the game.

▶ or *Aliens Vs Predator 2*'s Survivor into a single-player campaign.

The Thing **landed to positive critical reviews, but even Computer Artworks was a bit surprised when it also turned out to be a commercial success; how was anyone to gauge the pulling power of an IP that had been under the ice for 20 years?** "No one knew if it would be successful," Andrew recalls. "I think it really surprised us a little bit." The game's cause was helped along by John Carpenter himself who – at a time when games hadn't yet earned the respect of more established mediums as an art form unto themselves – took time out of his schedule to sign copies of the game at E3 and offer his voice and likeness for the character Dr Faraday.

After *The Thing*, Computer Artworks took on several new projects. Andrew was assigned to work on a new *Alone In The Dark* game, while much of the original *The Thing* team began to work on a sequel. It was filled with promising features, such as more dynamic infections and a greater variety of Thing burst-outs.

> "I'VE GONE THROUGH YOUTUBE VIDEOS, PEOPLE PLAYING THE GAME, WROTE DOWN ALL THE CRITICISMS, AND FIXED – MAYBE NOT EVERY SINGLE THING – BUT A LOT OF IT HAS BEEN REWORKED"
> RON ASHTIANI

Unfortunately, due to what Andrew calls "expansion and mismanagement" Computer Artworks went under in 2003, leaving the team ruing what could have been.

"If you look at successful systems-based games like *The Sims* or even *Forza Horizon*, they're games that are built on a version on a version on a version to a point where they're able to build really sophisticated systems," says Ron. "God, if we'd been able to do that with *The Thing*, I dare say by the time we got to the third one, it would have been fully dynamic with all sorts of amazing technology and systems in there."

The Thing could easily have gone down as an admirable but ill-fated footnote in gaming history, but thanks to the efforts of Nightdive Studios, it's getting remastered, with Mark Atkinson and Ron Ashtiani at the helm. "In broad terms, this isn't just a reskin with 4K and high-res textures," Mark tells us. "I've gone through YouTube videos, people playing the game, wrote down all the criticisms, and fixed – maybe not every single thing – but a lot of it has been reworked."

So the remaster will not only include techy improvements like shadow mapping,

SEQUELS AND PREQUELS

DIFFERENT GAMES HAVE ACTED AS SEQUELS AND PREQUELS TO MOVIES WITH VARYING DEGREES OF SUCCESS

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

■ This prequel to the Riddick film *Pitch Black* is one of the greatest licensed movie games of all time. Following Riddick as he seeks to escape the grim prison planet, the game ran on Starbreeze Studios' proprietary engine and saw you sneaking, fighting and chatting your way through the environments. It does a great job of fleshing out Riddick's backstory too, showing us how he gained his famous eye-shine.

TERMINATOR: RESISTANCE

■ Covering the events of the future war depicted in *Terminator* and *Terminator 2*, we guess you could call *Resistance* a prequel to the events of the movie… but set in the future? The first-person shooter casts you as resistance soldier Jacob Rivers, who joins up with John Connor to take on Skynet, following all the events that lead to the events of the movies. Critics didn't love it, fans did. Play it to see whose side you're on.

GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEOGAME

■ With a story co-written by OG Ghostbusters Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis, this game brings together the entire voice cast and follows the hijinks of the whole team following the events of the second movie. It's wonderfully faithful to the spirit and canon of *Ghostbusters*, and it wouldn't be a stretch to say it's a better sequel to the first two movies than any of the official movies that followed.

TRON 2.0

■ An oft-overlooked gem from Monolith Productions, *Tron 2.0* is a first-person shooter that takes place 20 years after the events of the original movie, casting you as the Tron creator's son Jet Bradley. It does a great job of integrating modern technologies with *Tron*'s retro-futuristic world, reprises characters from the movie, and lets you explore and learn about its mysterious neon-gridded world.

dynamic lighting, and specular maps that will improve the game's atmosphere and give Thing-creatures that slimy, glossy sheen that enthralled and appalled us in the movie – it will fix more objectionable sections as well.

Mark and Ron have been in touch with much of the original development team, including Andrew, and are well aware that the game's latter stages aren't as strong as the early going, with difficulty and boss fights needing rebalancing in several areas. "So you'd have a bit where it was too easy, then you'd die like 20 times," Ron says, referring to a particularly awkward escape sequence where getting blown up was almost unavoidable (unless, we discovered, you slowly walked through this segment so that the explosions would trigger before you reached them, somewhat undermining the sense that you were escaping a base that was falling apart around you). "I didn't really know what I was doing back then, so we were just like, 'Yeah, let's revisit that,' and so we've rebalanced a lot of these things." Lead artist Joel Welsh, meanwhile, has lifted much of the environmental art, adding small details from the 1982 movie – signage, radios, pinball machines, certain colours of chairs – into the game.

For Nightdive's CEO Stephen Kick, *The Thing Remastered* is, as many Nightdive remasters are, something of a passion project, with the PS2 version being a childhood favourite game of his. For Ron and Mark, meanwhile, the remaster's been an opportunity to reconnect with their old pals at Computer Artworks, uncovering source code and invaluable assets that are allowing them to finally smooth out the game's rough edges, backed up by an extra two decades of industry experience.

The Thing was an impressive game shadowed by the sense the technology of the time wasn't quite ready for it, and the disappointment that we never got a sequel in which the developers could really refine its most promising systems. The upcoming remaster might not be that sequel, but it's still a great opportunity to realise the potential of one of the sixth gaming generation's unrefined gems. ✱

» [PC] This handy pop-up menu lets you transfer weapons between squadmates, give them commands, and get an idea of their health and morale.

» [PC] We're trying to remember why we killed this guy, but we think we just wanted to see how everyone would react. The result? No one minded.

» [PC] When the game slowed down, it could become intensely atmospheric, much like Carpenter's movie.

DIE HARD VENDETTA

■ Blockbuster movies don't necessarily mean blockbuster videogame adaptations. *Die Hard: Vendetta* may officially continue the adventures of John McClane, but you're unlikely to be shouting, "Yippee-Ki-Yay." There's certainly some interesting concepts packed into Bits Studios' game, but it's a painfully average first-person shooter that adds little to the genre or *Die Hard* lore.

» [PC] The pandemonium that ensues with squadmates makes *The Thing* game to John Carpenter's movie what *Aliens* was to *Alien*.

Xbox Debug Kit fact

■ If you're only interested in the Xbox Debug Kit for its translucent green casing, a limited-edition *Halo* Xbox in the same colour scheme is also available.

PROCESSOR: 32-BIT INTEL PENTIUM III CPU (733 MHZ)
STORAGE: 8GB HARD DISK, OPTIONAL 32MB MEMORY CARD
GRAPHICS: NVIDIA GEFORCE 3-BASED NV2A (233MHZ), UP TO 21.9 MILLION POLYGONS PER SECOND (WITH 2 TEXTURES, LIGHTING, Z BUFFER, ALPHA AND FOG)
AUDIO: NVIDIA MCPX, 64 3D SOUND CHANNELS
OPERATING SYSTEM: CUSTOM XBOX OS
MEDIA: DVD-ROM (UP TO 8.5GB)
RAM: 128MB DDR SDRAM

Xbox Debug Kit

» **MANUFACTURER:** Microsoft » **YEAR:** 2001
» **COST:** N/A – never sold at retail (launch), £1,000+ (today, boxed), £400+ (today, unboxed)

The Xbox Debug Kit may look like a special edition of the original Xbox, but the name gives away its purpose – it was primarily designed for developers to use when testing Xbox games in development. It is able to run Xbox games without the standard digital signature needed by regular consoles, both from DVD and from the console's internal hard disk, but can't play officially released game discs. This hardware was also used by other professionals including the media, in order to play preview builds of games. Although never intended for regular gamers, some units have made their way into the wild.

Although original Xbox consoles are easily modded to have similar functions, Xbox Debug Kits are prized for reasons beyond their cool colour scheme. Firstly, they have 128MB RAM as standard, which allows them to run more demanding homebrew games and even arcade games designed for Sega's Xbox-based Chihiro board. Secondly, their internal hard disks can contain early versions of games that were both released and unreleased, and the presence of something particularly noteworthy can drive interest within the preservation scene. ✱

ESSENTIAL GAME

Kameo: Elements Of Power

If you're running a game on a console this special, it should be one that is equally special – so how about this unreleased game from a world-renowned developer? *Kameo: Elements Of Power* eventually launched on the Xbox 360, but its lengthy development started way back on the GameCube. The target shifted to the original Xbox along the way and plenty of work was done, enough for preview builds to be shown to the press in 2004. Now your only problem is tracking down such an elusive piece of history.

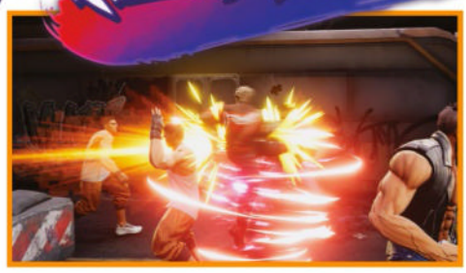
SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

» As usual, you can choose between the Lee brothers.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ARC SYSTEM WORKS
» **DEVELOPER:** YUKE'S
» **RELEASE:** 2025
» **PLATFORM:** PS4/5, XBOX ONE/SERIES, PC
» **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

DOUBLE DRAGON REVIVE



DOUBLE DRAGON IS ONE OF THE FOREFATHERS AND GREAT CLASSICS OF THE BEAT-'EM-UP GENRE, WHICH WILL ENTER A COMPLETELY NEW ROUND IN 2025 WITH DOUBLE DRAGON REVIVE. DOES THE OLD FIGHTER STILL STAND A CHANCE AGAINST YOUNGER AND FRESHER OPPONENTS?

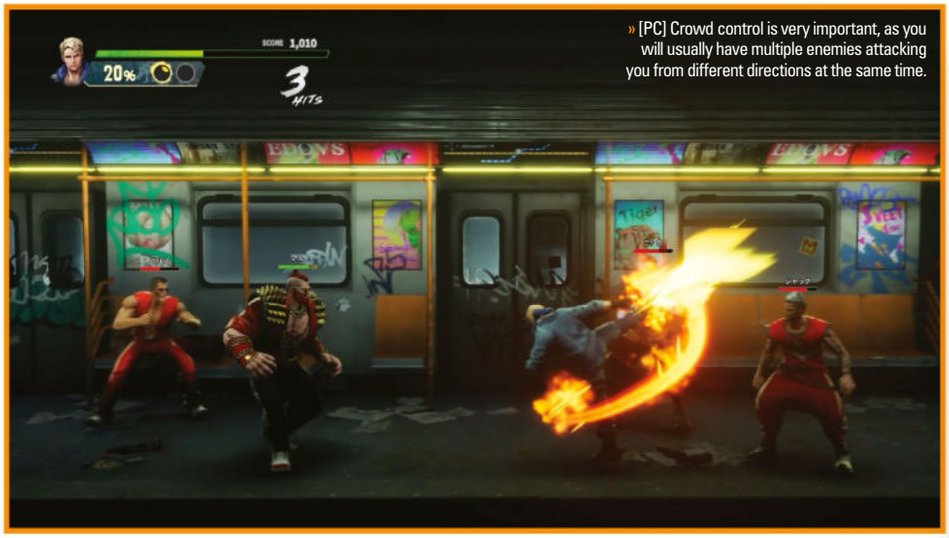
WORDS BY PAUL KAUTZ

Released in 1987, *Double Dragon* wasn't the first belt-scrolling beat-'em-up – that honour goes to irem's 1984 *Kung Fu Master*, also known as *Spartan X*. But it was the first to set standards for the genre that still hold true today – things like two-player co-op, the use of weapons and free movement in 3D space. Find out more about the development of this groundbreaking title in our in-depth Making Of in **Retro Gamer** 103.

After *Double Dragon*, the brawler genre became massive, with the likes of *Final Fight* and *Streets Of Rage* taking over. And even though *Double Dragon* has faded into the background over the years, the series was never really gone: there are several games in the main series, countless spin-offs and crossovers (with other series such as *Battletoads*), and reboots such as *Double Dragon Revive*, planned for 2025.

Arc System Works, based in Yokohama, Japan, is best known these days for its excellent and complex fighting games in the *Guilty Gear* and *BlazBlue* series. Yuke's of Osaka, on the other hand, is best known for its excellent wrestling games in the *WWE 2K* series. The perfect combination for a bombastic revival of *Double Dragon*, as lead designer Guillaume 'Kaito' Cailteux assures us in an interview. "After the development of *Double Dragon IV* in 2017, some fans were disappointed that the game didn't go in a new direction. In addition, newcomers to the series did not respond to the game, as the game design elements that we had left as faithful as possible to the previous games felt like counterpoints to newcomers," we're told. "With this in mind, we decided to take the essence of what made the original *Double Dragon* games so unique and innovative for their time, and create a game that would be a natural evolution of the series, while still paying respect to a series that has been with the development team since our childhood.

» Guillaume 'Kaito' Cailteux is the lead designer of *Double Dragon Revive* at Arc System Works in Yokohama.



» [PC] Crowd control is very important, as you will usually have multiple enemies attacking you from different directions at the same time.

Yuke's have made some fantastic fighting games in the past and we work very closely with their developers."

The most obvious result of this collaboration is that *Double Dragon Revive* will not be a typical brawler like *Streets Of Rage 4* or *Final Vendetta*, but will incorporate elements of modern fighting games such as Arc System Works' *BlazBlue* series, which will turn fights against a variety of opponents into strategic battles with many different attack options, complex combos and counters. You can grab enemies and beat them up in close range, or you can incorporate parts of the environment (known as Stage Gimmicks) into the fights, so that your pitiful opponents will sooner or later find themselves in rubbish bins, fridges or even basketball hoops, or pushed against a fence and beaten up relentlessly. Of course, you can also pick up and use weapons lying around; knives and baseball bats are familiar, but how many times have you kicked a basketball into an opponent's face? There are also throws, double jumps and the effect-heavy special attacks, which all ensure that *Double Dragon Revive*'s combat system goes far beyond the usual standards of the genre – and also allows for diagonal attacks, which makes very effective crowd control possible and important.

Of course, this also makes the game more difficult to access, especially for newcomers; a problem that the developers are aware of, according to Kaito. "Balancing is still in progress, and of course it will take some time. But in general, we are trying to get away from the typical button-mashing and give players a bit of a challenge. We have increased the difficulty, but we have also empowered the player characters to balance that out and make it less frustrating."

» [PC] The special attacks look quite impressive.

Essentially, though, the game remains familiar. Everything revolves around the two Lee brothers, Billy and Jimmy, and their girlfriend Marian, who have to fight for their survival in a post-apocalyptic world. They do this either alone or together in co-op mode, which can be played locally or online. According to Kaito, the developers took a lot of inspiration from the first two *Double Dragon* games, and he points out with a grin that the elbow back attack is still there, although it's not as game-breakingly overpowered anymore as it was in the original classic.

Originally, even bigger changes were planned for the game. "We looked at many different types of game loop models, including unlockable area exploration, roguelites/roguelikes, etc," explains Kaito. "In the end we decided to keep the core game loop simple and arcade-like, as it was originally and still is in most beat-'em-ups, so that players can focus on the action and the game feels more authentic to the old *Double Dragon* experience."

This also means that at the end of each level there is a mighty boss enemy, such as the giant wrestler Joji, the street brawler Williams, the quick-footed sisters Anh and Minh, and muscle mountain Abobo, who, like other enemies, is a familiar face hailing from the very first game. Billy and Jimmy's special attacks become even more important with the bosses and their sometimes very challenging attack patterns.

According to Kaito, drawing on the traditions of the series is a very tricky balancing act. "It is honestly one of the most challenging aspects of making a new game that actually feels new, in a very established series like *Double*

WHO LET THE DRAGON OUT?

Remembering the terrible screen outings of Double Dragon

In the Nineties, it seemed that every major fighting game series had to find its way to the big or smaller screen – and *Double Dragon* was not only no exception, but actually went both ways! It all started with the TV series, which ran for two seasons with a total of 26 episodes, and in keeping with the cartoon style of the time, no one was ever seriously injured in them – that would probably have limited action figure sales. Typical for this kind of cartoon series, the art style was quite cheesy, but at least the main theme, "Live the code, the code of the dragon! Fight for right, the might of the dragon!" was great!

The film, which was released about a month before the infamous *Street Fighter* movie and a year before *Mortal Kombat* entered the silver screen, was even more bizarre: the only person in this strange tale who even remotely knows what he's doing is a young Mark Dacascos – everyone else (including *Terminator 2* villain Robert Patrick as main villain Shuko, who is even blonder than Marian, played by Alyssa Milano) obviously only knows martial arts from hearsay. While it was a huge flop, it still got an official game with *Double Dragon* for the Neo Geo in 1995.

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» Many of the enemies (such as boss Abobo here) are familiar from previous entries in the series.

» [PC] A challenging boss fight awaits at the end of each level – where the new special attacks really come into their own.

» [PC] You can finish off a successful double jump with a powerful ground slam.

ENTER THE DOUBLE DRAGON

DOUBLE DRAGON NEON

2012

■ *Double Dragon Neon* delivered a lot of simple fighting fun and plenty of humour – but the brawler developed by 2D specialists WayForward was not that convincing. The controls were too stiff, and it's rather short with some frustrating level design choices, but it's still enjoyable fluff. At least the music by Jake Kaufman was awesome!

DOUBLE DRAGON IV

2017

■ Released to coincide with the series' 30th anniversary, *Double Dragon IV* was the first *Double Dragon* title to be developed independently by Arc System Works, and it returned to the series' roots in every way possible – complete with pixelated 8-bit graphics and simplistic, occasionally frustrating gameplay.

DOUBLE DRAGON COLLECTION

2023

■ There is no better way to get back to the roots of the *Double Dragon* series, as the collection available for PS4/5, Xbox One/Series, PC and Switch includes not only the NES versions of the three original games, but also *Super Double Dragon, Double Dragon Advance* and *Double Dragon IV,* each with graphic filters and save systems.

» [PC] *Double Dragon Revive* is unlikely to win any beauty awards, but its graphics are full of sweet detail and special effects.

» [PC] The combat system goes beyond button-mashing to include more complex inputs, reminiscent of modern fighting games.

Dragon," he says. "Especially since, unlike other iconic franchises that have a very clear definition of what the art style, world building and story elements of the IP should be, *Double Dragon* has seen many different directions over the years, even during its 2D era. The character of Marian, for example, is very characteristic of this phenomenon: she started out as a damsel in distress, but then became a police officer, a gang leader, a supernatural being possessed by an ancient Egyptian queen, etc. Was her main colour red? Yellow? Pink? Or maybe green? How the character is perceived will depend heavily on what games or other *Double Dragon*-related media each player has come into contact with and which have left the most lasting impression."

Keeping everyone happy is a conundrum that the team has had to solve, but Kaito is confident that the team has managed it. "While there is indeed an image of what *Double Dragon* is that is shared by the fanbase as a whole, when we actually look at it we can see that this 'shared image' is quite loose and many fans will have a different image of what *Double Dragon* is, all because of the ever-changing nature of the series," he continues. "There is no 'safe' way or objective guideline of what *Double Dragon* should be. One way or another, we have to take risks. This became even more apparent after we tried as hard as we could with *Double Dragon IV* to make a game that was very close to the first NES instalments and got the reception that we did."

That poor reception for *Double Dragon IV* meant a rethink for the series and the game Kaito is currently working on. "We decided that the best course of action was to reboot the main series and lay a foundation for what it could be from now on, which we can build on in possible future instalments," explains Kaito. "Our goal is to imagine what would be a natural evolution of these games, both in terms of gameplay and world building. So we started with *Double Dragon 1* and *2*, as they are the games that revolutionised the genre the most, have the most universally recognised world building, and built on that with our own spin."

The result is a game that is very much aware of its famous roots, but at the same time is not afraid to break old habits where necessary. The graphics, for example, completely abandon the pixel look of its predecessors (or contemporaries such as *Final Vendetta*) and rely entirely on detailed polygon objects for characters and environments. According to Kaito, this not only allows for more elaborate graphical effects, which can be seen in the sometimes quite spectacular special attacks, but also makes it much easier to move around in 3D space. The levels are also much more interactive than ever before, meaning that their structure can change as you fight your way through them. And not only do the two brothers look very different, they also move differently and have unique attacks. The game is still in the middle of development, with no precise release date beyond 2025. It plays a little stiff at the moment, but shows a lot of potential and dedication from the developers, who are clearly big fans of the series. "As an experience that made me feel the most 'wow' at the time, and even now given how ahead of its time it was, I would have to say *Double Dragon 1* and *2* on the NES made the biggest impact on me," Kaito tells us. "It was all about the environment. I have vivid memories of how certain parts, like Stage 3 in *Double Dragon 2*, Battle In The Chopper, felt so different and 'interactive' from most other games at the time. In this stage, you fight inside a helicopter while in flight, and from time to time the door opens and characters are pulled towards the door or even sucked out. It's a dangerous gimmick because you can easily lose your life, but it can also be an element that you can use to your advantage if you use your head and knock enemies down just before the door opens so that they're sucked out of the helicopter with no chance of getting up. It made me feel like I was playing a character in an action film, it was just so cool!"

Kaito wants to take the coolness of those earlier games and apply it to the team's new fighter. Time will tell if they succeed in their task. "With *Double Dragon Revive*, we want to go further than the series has ever gone with this aspect, giving the player as many options as possible for a given situation, while still keeping the core gameplay style as a beat-'em up!" Kaito says. "We want to make a game that will obviously appeal to old fans of the series, but also take away some of the traditional pain points of the genre as a whole and make a game that is enjoyable for both older and younger action game fans. In other words, we looked at what kind of barriers there were to entering the games, and if that was something we could improve without hurting the game's identity, and if it made sense overall, we did it. But we are careful not to go too far so that the game will still be a true *Double Dragon* game."

Recent Double Dragon games to try

DOUBLE DRAGON GAIDEN: RISE OF THE DRAGONS

2023

■ The Japanese word Gaiden means side story, which in this case stands for prequel. Developed by Secret Base, this spin-off goes back to the roots of the Lee brothers and offers very loving pixel art, lots of playable characters, roguelike elements and a fleshed-out online mode – great fun for all fighting fans!

World of Warcraft: An Enduring Legacy

Whether or not you have any idea what Leeroy Jenkins, Bubble Hearthing and Thunderfury, Blessed Blade Of The Windseeker actually mean, you have surely heard a fair bit about WOW over the years. To celebrate its massive anniversary milestone this month, we look back at 20 years of World Of Warcrack... sorry, Warcraft

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES

If you had joined us earlier in the year, you would have spotted us celebrating the release of *EverQuest* 25 years ago, bringing about the MMO revolution and standardising a lot of what would go on to be replicated in countless other entries into the genre ever since. But for as impressive as it was – as genre-forming, industry-bending as it was – you simply can't talk about MMOs without that globally recognised acronym: *WOW*.

World Of Warcraft is also celebrating a significant birthday this November, and with two decades under its belt it won't be long until it's legally able to drink in an American bar. There's some irony to these milestone birthdays, however, since if not for the impact that *EverQuest* had on the team at Blizzard, WOW might never have been made at all. For Kevin Beardslee, one of the original team members on *World Of Warcraft*, the release of *EverQuest* was a turning point for the studio, who were at the time trying to get a completely different project off the ground. "I remember Shane Dabiri [*WOW* producer] telling me, 'You gotta try this *EverQuest* beta out,'" says Kevin, "and so we hopped in on it and we were like, 'Oh wow, this is really cool.' We created two Blizzard guilds, Interloop and Frostwolves." But for as all-consuming as *EverQuest* was, it got Kevin thinking that there were improvements that could be made with a little bit of Blizzard magic. It was Kevin who would go on to pitch an MMO project to the management at the studio. "Why don't we, Blizzard, do something like *EverQuest*? Because the *EverQuest* controls were clunky, the art was meh, we've got such better universes."

> "WE KNEW WE HAD AN AUDIENCE THAT LOVES WARCRAFT, SO LET'S BRING THEM IN MUCH CLOSER AND LET THEM EXPERIENCE THE WORLD"
> KEVIN BEARDSLEE

Within a week, the struggling Project Nomad was cancelled and preproduction on a Blizzard MMO began, though Kevin's pitch suggested either *StarCraft* or *Warcraft* as the potential settings for the game. It was put to a vote, and ultimately the fantasy RTS was selected as the one to go with. "We knew we had an audience that loves *Warcraft*," recalls Kevin of that initial concept, "so let's bring them in much closer and let them experience the world. Even *World Of Warcraft* was the working title of the game." While *EverQuest* would be foundational in what Blizzard wanted to achieve, and even defined a lot of the design decisions that would be made, there was a long list of improvements that the team wanted to implement with their own MMO. "I had been playing *Quake 3D*," says Kevin, who had been put in command of the game's movement and input, "the controls felt so good: ASD-movement, the legs and the way they rotated, your head would turn and jumping… just everything!" This inspired Kevin to ensure that *WOW* had a similar "joy of movement" because in comparison, "*EverQuest* just felt terrible."

In fact, everyone at the studio had their own opinions on what needed to be done to 'fix' *EverQuest* and to make an MMO with Blizzard's already notorious quality. "Personally, I had a concern with the lack of quests [in *EverQuest*]," says Bo Bell, one of the game designers that had been brought up from QA to help build out the world and zones of *WOW*, "especially for a game that was named *EverQuest*. There was very little guidance on what to do in the game or how to do it and a general lack of content." Originally Blizzard had intended to match *EQ*'s lack of direction for questing, but an overzealous designer "went nuts" on quests for Elwynn Forest, which was the first zone that Blizzard perfected as a boilerplate for all other zones afterwards. "The reaction was

» [PC] Progressing from sub-10 points of damage up to the thousands is a constantly rewarding experience.

» [PC] "Alliance or Horde?" To this day this question remains a pertinent one for all *WOW* players.

that we all wanted more quests, and the team leadership agreed as well and made it a focus of our content creation."

Everything from mana regen and what happens when the player dies, the time it takes to kill something and the player's jump height with everything in between were refactored as Blizzard refined what an MMO should be. Inspiration didn't just come from ways to improve on *EverQuest*, but from across the industry. "I think I was playing *Metal Gear Solid* at the time and whenever that 'bbbrrnnk!' exclamation point alert would go above their head I knew: A) I'm terrified and B) I clearly know that the guy hates me," says Kevin of how *WOW* got its iconic NPC exclamation mark. "I was like, what if we put that above the quest giver's head? You will know that you should probably talk to that guy, but in *EverQuest* you don't even know the magic phrase to say to someone for a quest." Kevin jokingly relents that in hindsight "it probably should have been a question mark" but this was the sort of seemingly minuscule detail that got iterated on.

Over the course of its near five-year development, *WOW* would scale up to involve the majority of the studio – who were also working on *Warcraft III* at the time. But this ▶

» [PC] Professions played a big part of the *WOW* experience, but those with a high Cooking skill were surprisingly popular in raids.

KEVIN BEARDSLEE

■ Kevin pitched the concept of *WOW* and touched the game's design, art style and overall balance. Nowadays he's the studio head of Paydirt Games.

BO BELL

■ Bo was brought over from QA to help build *WOW*'s quests and zones. He is now the principal combat designer at Fortis Games.

was just a project that was easy to get everyone on board, and that eagerness shone through to the final product. "This can't be understated enough: when a development team really, really loves the work they are doing and have bought into the vision of the game, then amazing things can happen," explains Bo. "The passion and love that went into making the original game really shined through and was difficult to replicate."

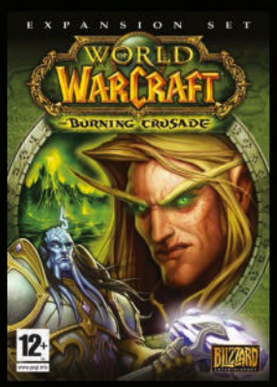
There weren't really any doubts surrounding *World Of Warcraft*'s potential success, and *EverQuest*'s continually increasing player subscribers offering tantalising promise for *WOW*. Bo recalls the moment that told him that the MMO was going to be a winner, not long after mounts had been added into the alpha. "There were some breadcrumb quests that took you into Westfall around level 9 with a few introductory Westfall quests. However, the big breadcrumb quest that took you just over the bridge from Elwynn to Westfall gave you a mount as a reward. I vividly remember playing with the other level designers, finishing up those last few quests when someone came riding up the road on a horse." This was, as Bo puts it, a "magical" moment. "I needed that horse," he says. "Shortly thereafter, the four of us made it over the bridge and received our mounts. We rode around for a good 15 minutes just having fun. That's when we all knew we were making something special." For Kevin, the turning point for him was when he found he was choosing to play *WOW* while it was still in development instead of *EverQuest*. "We would just hop in and do the weekly raid or whatever in *EverQuest*," he recalls, "but then we'd just come back and play *WOW* all night in alpha."

"We even talked about how much money it could generate a month," says Bo. "At the time *EverQuest* was pulling in something like $500,000 per month. We said things like we could see *WOW* easily hitting that, maybe even $800K. Or how about $1,000,000?! We had a good laugh about that one, but we all kind of thought maybe it could do that for real." But even these 'wild' estimations would pale in comparison to the real successes of *World Of Warcraft*. Within months of its November 2004 release, the MMO had already reached 1.5 million subscribers. Multiply that by the $15 subscription fee, let alone the cost of the game alone, and you'll understand what *WOW* has achieved for Blizzard since its release. After only a year, the total shot up to 6 million subscribers and beyond.

That's not to say it was the perfect game, certainly it had flaws that would go on to be addressed in any of the countless updates or expansion packs, but its accessible gameplay, captivating world and story, and its iconic potato-PC compatible visuals continued to draw in the crowds. The question was, what was next? "Part of us was super excited," says Kevin, "we got raids out and there was stuff that was in progress that we had to go live with." The problem was that the studio had endured a two-year crunch to hit the release date, and the prospect of doing it again was naturally not a thrilling proposal. "We did take a breath, we slowed down, we

> "WE WOULD JUST HOP IN AND DO THE WEEKLY RAID OR WHATEVER IN EVERQUEST, BUT THEN WE'D JUST COME BACK AND PLAY WOW ALL NIGHT IN ALPHA"
> KEVIN BEARDSLEE

EXPANDING AZEROTH



THE BURNING CRUSADE

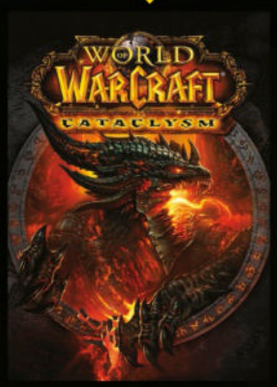
2007

There were many options for what would be the setting for the first expansion, but in the end Blizzard decided to send players through that overbearing portal at the bottom of the Eastern Kingdoms back to the homeworld of the orcs.

WRATH OF THE LICH KING

2008

Facing one of Blizzard's most iconic characters from *Warcraft III* was a smart choice, but the quality of the expansion, its end-game raid content and all the improvements it brought to the game have it placed as one of the best Blizzard ever made.



CATACLYSM

2010

Even a couple of years after release, *WOW* was starting to look dated. This expansion pack brought with it a world-sundering destruction at the hands of Deathwing. It meant a rebuilt Azeroth, enhanced visuals and a faster levelling experience but was the start of *WOW*'s 'simplification'.

MISTS OF PANDARIA

2012

Perhaps one of the most divisive expansion packs, the introduction of the playable Pandaren race and Asian-inspired aesthetic pushed a lot of players away. If you ask this writer, however, in terms of an overall package, this was one of Blizzard's best.

WARLORDS OF DRAENOR

2014

Perhaps in an attempt to win back some of the players lost to the 'Kung Fu Pandaria' expansion, *Warlords Of Draenor* was dripping with nostalgia and classic *Warcraft* lore. It missed the mark in a lot of ways, though, with a mishmashed story and sub-par attempt at player 'housing'.

» [PC] Each inn in a new location was a bastion for quests, other players and a place to /dance emote on the tables.

stopped crunching. We had a few months. But by February we were ramping up again and it was like, 'We gotta get this expansion out by Christmas.' We were like, 'What? We don't even know what it is yet!'"

As with any MMO, it was essential that enough work was done on the game to keep the playerbase engaged, whether that was balance patches and content updates or the next expansion pack. "We started thinking about where we should go next, and I remember we were thinking of doing pandas if China really was this big of a market. Somebody had even made a panda character. We were looking at Nazjatar, that was talked about as a potential first expansion and what it would be like to be in an underwater zone. I remember we were considering going into the Emerald Dream. Obviously we had this giant portal in Badlands, and clearly players want to know what that is for." Ultimately it was decided that Outland, through that portal, would be the next destination for players when *The Burning Crusade* released – not by Christmas but in fact January 2007. By this point *World Of Warcraft* was already hitting phenomenal levels of popularity, reaching into pop culture and drawing in players from around the world. *The Burning Crusade* sold 2.4 million copies on release day alone, and was very well received by an audience that was eager for a little more from vanilla *WOW*.

At this point *World Of Warcraft* had already cemented itself as the MMO to beat, and countless other games looking to take on the burgeoning genre fell to the wayside. *EverQuest*, which had been the springboard from which *WOW* could leap, had its active subscribers peak in 2004 at 'just' 550,000. While this number was cannibalised somewhat with the release of *EverQuest II* ▶

» [PC] It is customary to shout 'Ding!' with each new level. Expect numerous 'gz' (congrats) in response.

A TIMELINE OF EVERY WOW EXPANSION PACK

LEGION

2016

■ Easily 'modern' *WOW*'s best expansion, *Legion* was heavy on the *Warcraft* lore and nostalgia putting the Burning Crusade at the forefront. But it added in heaps of changes to the gameplay too, from Artifact Weapons to the player Demon Hunter class.

BATTLE FOR AZEROTH

2018

■ Coming off *Legion*, the *WOW* playerbase were optimistic for the future of the game. *Battle For Azeroth*, however, is considered to be the worst expansion. It lacked any real storyline and the new zones just struggled to inspire the way *WOW* usually does.

SHADOWLANDS

2020

■ Blizzard needed to do something grand to recover after *Battle For Azeroth*, but *Shadowlands* was just not enough. Its story lacked the usual consistency, the Land Of The Dead zones weren't thrilling and questionable design choices would place it at the bottom of any tier list.

DRAGONFLIGHT

2022

■ Things were turned around by *Dragonflight*, with many players calling this expansion a return to form. It introduced a new race and player class, a fun flying mechanism in dragon riding and some of *WOW*'s most gorgeous zones in the Dragon Isles and the Emerald Dream.

THE WAR WITHIN

2024

■ The latest expansion has the playerbase excited about the future of *WOW*. It's the start of Blizzard's own attempt at an MCU-like plan, part of the Worldsoul Saga trilogy that will spread its narrative across three interconnected expansions. It's been very well received.

» [PC] That quiet 'ping' could be heard every time you passed an Enchanter hard at work.

» [PC] Some dungeons were more popular than others, in many cases this tied directly to how easy they were to get to.

» [PC] Where the Alliance players will remember lush forests, Horde players will have a fondness for savannas and deserts.

just two weeks before *WOW* originally launched, by the time the third expansion pack *Wrath Of The Lich King* released in 2008, *EverQuest* and *EverQuest II* had a combined subscriber tally of 200,000 while *WOW* was sitting pretty at 11.5 million. This was the impact of *WOW*'s success, and it wasn't only *EverQuest* that saw this downwards trend. *Star Wars Galaxies, Dark Age Of Camelot*, *Ultima Online* as well as post-*WOW* MMOs like *Warhammer Online* and *Rift* all struggled to compete with the behemoth sucking up all the players.

Then came *Cataclysm* in 2010, which reworked the whole of the two continents on Azeroth in the wake of the destruction caused by the appearance of a once slumbering dragon with the quaint name of Deathwing. Starting at this point with the historical peak of 12 million, *World Of Warcraft* has since seen a steady decline in its subscriber numbers. Many will point to *Cataclysm* as the beginning of *WOW*'s oversimplification, where dungeons and raiding was reduced to by-the-numbers gameplay and the LookingForGroup system removed a massive part of the social aspect of the game and working together to complete these otherwise challenging tasks. And while it is true that the *World Of Warcraft* of 2024 is a considerably more lenient experience than its yesteryear equivalent, there's an argument to be made that those players who once upon a time could devote their time to endless wipes in Blackrock Depths or had the energy to play sleeplessly for days on end to hit the new level cap with each new expansion likely aren't able to do so 20 years later.

> "SOME OF THEM WERE SIMPLY AMAZING JOURNEYS AND I AM SO HAPPY I WAS ABLE TO GO ALONG FOR THOSE RIDES"
> BO BELL

Time comes for us all, we grow up, build a career, get married, start a family; if *WOW* had still expected the same dedication that it did back in 2004 then in all likelihood the game would've already closed its last server as its playerbase aged and with that have less free time to spare for a second life in Azeroth. "The success of the original allowed Blizzard to make more and more and more," says Bo of *WOW*'s long-term appeal. "Bigger, better and more refined with each update. Sure, there were some expansions that didn't do all that well, but then again some of them were simply amazing journeys and I am so happy I was able to go along for those rides."

And for many players, albeit perhaps not the most hardcore raiding guilds and player-versus-player pros, there's a comfort to *WOW* that few other games past or present have been able to provide. The numbers speak for themselves, too, because while Blizzard hasn't officially announced subscriber totals since it dropped to 5.5 million after the release of *Warlords Of Draenor* in 2015, savvy sleuths on the

WOW GOES POP

HOW WORLD OF WARCRAFT BROKE OUT OF THE GAMES INDUSTRY AND INTO POPULAR CULTURE

MAKE LOVE, NOT WARCRAFT

■ Arguably the most iconic moment of *WOW*'s history was when *South Park* made an entire episode about it, even featuring in-game recreations of Stan, Cartman, Kenny and the others. Working alongside Blizzard, this was as much a love note to *WOW* as it was a tongue-in-cheek jibe at the nerds who play it.

ME NOT THAT KIND OF ORC!

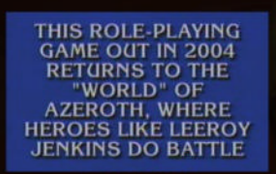
■ *WOW* tends to draw attention when the public learns that a celebrity is also a Warcrack addict. Jamie Lee Curtis is noteworthy in this regard, considering she appeared in orc cosplay at the premiere of the *Warcraft* movie. She even officiated her daughter's wedding dressed as famed Alliance mage Jaina Proudmoore.

MR CONDESCENDING DIRECTOR

■ Many gamers will remember the *WOW* commercials featuring a number of well-known celebrities, from Ozzy Osbourne to William Shatner. Mr T's is perhaps the most popular, which featured the recognisable character/actor claiming, "Maybe Mr T is pretty handy with computers?"

FROM AZEROTH TO TABLETOP

■ As with any supremely popular IP, *WOW* has been turned into a number of bespoke board games, comic books and even a version of *Trivial Pursuit*. But gamers of a certain age will most likely remember walking up to the cash register of any gaming or gamer-adjacent store and seeing the *WOW* trading card game packs.



JEOPARDY QUESTION

■ It's long been a barometer for cultural ubiquity when you're an answer on *Jeopardy*, but when *WOW* was an answer on the game show in 2005 it didn't just use Azeroth as its clue but it also name dropped the infamous Leeroy Jenkins which, at this point, had already cemented itself as one of *WOW*'s most notorious moments.

internet estimate that the number of active subscribers is constantly flitting between 4 and 7 million, peaking with the release of *World Of Warcraft Classic* in 2019 with a guesstimate of 8.2 million.

And let's not forget, *WOW*'s history is far from over. "They got Chris Metzen back!" says Kevin when considering *WOW*'s future. "He understands the narrative and the pacing and all that," he adds, and certainly Metzen's guiding hand on the narrative and lore of all of Blizzard's games has been a critical part of the studio's success over the years. Since returning to Blizzard in 2023, Metzen spearheaded the *Worldsoul Saga*, a trio of expansion packs that began with *The War Within* and will share an interconnected story once described by Metzen himself as "too epic to be contained in a single expansion". Does this mean there's plans that will see us through to another 20 years of *World Of Warcraft*? Perhaps. But whatever comes to pass, what is clear is that whether you're a regular raider, a rare mount hunter or simply like to hang out in Stormwind spamming the general chat trying to make friends, Azeroth is going to be your home for a good while yet.

» [PC] That iconic quest icon has since been reworked in modern *WOW*, but it is iconic enough to live on in the hearts of gamers everywhere.

» [PC] Blackwing Lair was the first raid to be added to the game, a 40-man raid against dragons, Fire Elementals and the Firelord Ragnaros.

» [PC] Nowadays players use their higher-level characters to breeze through old school raids for an easy chance at those iconic armour sets.

AZEROTH REVISED

HOW THE PAST IS WOW'S NEW FUTURE

After years of demand, Blizzard released *World Of Warcraft Classic* five years ago, giving nostalgic players a chance to play out their lives in Azeroth as if nothing had ever changed. It proved to be a smart decision though, since it was instantly popular even to a point of drawing some long since lapsed players back into the fold.

But Blizzard didn't stop there. Over the years since, it's been updating *Classic* with a similar fervour to what is now termed as 'retail *WOW*'. While the core mechanics were left mostly untouched, Blizzard still brought balance patches and quality-of-life improvements over to the old-school version of the game. And towards the end of last year, Blizzard introduced its Season Of Discovery, a special time-limited event that significantly altered the world and gameplay for some one-off fun. It brought with it dramatic changes to raids (particularly a completely reworked Blackfathom Depths), an accelerated levelling experience and even fun twists to classes that saw Mages healing and Priests tanking.

The popularity of this event drew more players than ever over to *Classic*, and it has since become a significant part of the *WOW* experience and something that Blizzard has since continued to pour time and resources into. As it stands, *Classic* is no longer a nostalgic novelty, but one half of *WOW*'s future.

Virtua Quest

SEI IT AIN'T SO

» GAMECUBE » 2004 » TOSE/SEGA AM2

In a recent issue, I showed off my collection of *Virtua Fighter* games and accidentally excluded *Virtua Quest*. It's not a game I should be forgetting – it was never released in the UK, and my purchase of a Freeloader disc was solely motivated by the desire to play it. Unfortunately, even by the time I got it, I knew it wasn't the game I wanted it to be. You see, *Shenmue* was initially conceptualised as a *Virtua Fighter* RPG, and early news on the game had me hoping that Sega was returning to the idea of fleshing out those characters.

Instead, *Virtua Quest* is an action adventure in which you play as Sei, a boy who spends his days selling data chips in a virtual world called Nexus. The vast majority of your time is spent running around the bland environments of Nexus, beating up cannon fodder baddies with a fighting system that draws little inspiration from *Virtua Fighter*'s sublime computerised combat. The famous faces are reduced to a secondary role of teaching Sei moves after an obligatory battle. They aren't even real people in the context of the game's plot, instead characterised as "Virtua Souls" – ghost data within Nexus.

When I do remember *Virtua Quest*, what really bothers me about it is that I can't work out who it's meant to be for. Sei could have been ripped from any anime for young boys of that era, and he's such a generic protagonist that you'd think he was intended to take a back seat to the *Virtua Fighter* cast. However, their limited screen time and the wildly different fighting mechanics don't seem designed to satisfy existing fans. You may surmise that the goal was to introduce Nintendo owners to the series, but the fighting games have never had a significant presence on the GameCube or later Nintendo platforms. It gives me a headache, which is probably why I repressed its memory in the first place. ✱

ne power
orge your own path.

>> This month sees us going hands-on with the Evercade Alpha, returning to Silent Hill with Bloober Team's impressive remake, reading about the evolution of videogame football and finding out if Blazing Strike is worth your hard-earned money

» While it's possible to switch over the marquees, you're stuck with the existing bezels. Thankfully, both look pretty nice.

Evercade Alpha

ARCADE THRILLS AND SPILLS

INFORMATION

- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £199.99, £249.99 (DELUXE MODEL)
- **PUBLISHER:** BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT
- **DEVELOPER:** BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT
- **BUY IT FROM:** ONLINE, RETAIL

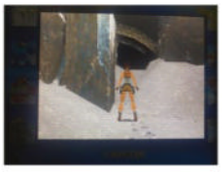
» Although you can add extra controllers for multiplayer sessions, you can't link two cabinets together.

It's been a good month for Evercade fans, with both this and the latest Super Pocket systems dropping, one which is focussed on Atari classics, the other devoted to Technos games. Rather than try and cram all three pieces of hardware into one review, we're going to focus this month on the Evercade Alpha, the latest member of the rapidly growing Evercade brand.

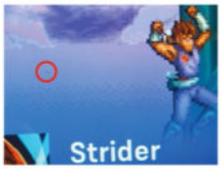
First impressions count and we'd argue that the Alpha is the best-looking device that Blaze has now released. It's a good-sized machine, dwarfing the numerous arcade minis that are already available, and has more of a presence than the cabinets in the Quarter Arcades range. Despite its considerable size, it still feels relatively portable, and while you're unlikely to want to lug it around a friend's house, you can easily move it from a shelf to a desk for playing with no effort at all.

It also feels exceptionally well made for the most part too, with a range of durable buttons, an excellent-feeling stick and a rather lovely 8-inch IPS screen. There's a dedicated headphone jack, two USB ports for additional controllers, a power outlet on the back, a lovely light-up swappable marquee, volume controls, two slots for Evercade cartridges and a neat coin slot that works as the on/off switch. It's a great-

» [Evercade Alpha] As you can see, you lose a lot of screen real estate when playing the Evercade library's many vertically oriented games.



» [Evercade Alpha] Older Evercade carts like *Tomb Raider* certainly look nice on the Alpha, but you'll need to re-map buttons for a more comfortable experience.



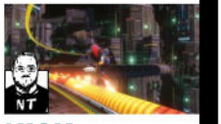
» Here's the mark on the inside of our screen. Hopefully we'll be able to remove it without damaging the unit.

✱PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Evercade: Toaplan Arcade 4

We couldn't fit it into this month's section, but rest assured this is a great mix of games, with *Snow Bros 2* being particularly enjoyable.



NICK

Sonic X Shadow Generations

The original *Sonic Generations* set a high standard to live up to, but Shadow's new stages are at least as good as Sonic's – maybe better.

UPGRADE YOUR ALPHA

▼ SHOULD YOU OPT FOR BLAZE'S DELUXE MODEL?

» For an extra £50 it's possible to upgrade your Alpha to the deluxe model, but is it worth it? The upgrade package includes Sanwa controls, five additional marquees rather than the standard three, a certificate of authenticity, an exclusive poster and an Evercade Alpha controller. While we've been unable to test the quality of the included Sanwa parts, the decision will largely come down to if you're already a VS owner. If you are, it's unlikely you're going to need the extra controller that comes with the system. Outside of those Sanwa parts the rest of the extras feel rather superfluous. Still, it's nice to have the option, particularly if you need that controller.

» The *Street Fighter* cabinet side-art is rather simplistic compared to the glorious-looking *Mega Man* cabinet.

» The *Mega Man* cabinet feels like better value for money, as there's more choice in the included six games.

looking device and the built-in Wi-Fi means the system is easy to update as well. In fact, our only issue is that there's a noticeable mark on the underside of our system's screen, which is quite distracting during play and is proving quite difficult to remove, so we're currently stuck with it. Hopefully it's just some fluff and not a scratch. The decision to not make the screen rotatable like the Egret II Mini is also worth mentioning, particularly when you consider how many of the arcade carts in the Evercade arcade range are vertically oriented games. That would obviously add to the expense, but if we're honest, we'd have probably preferred that over the built-in games.

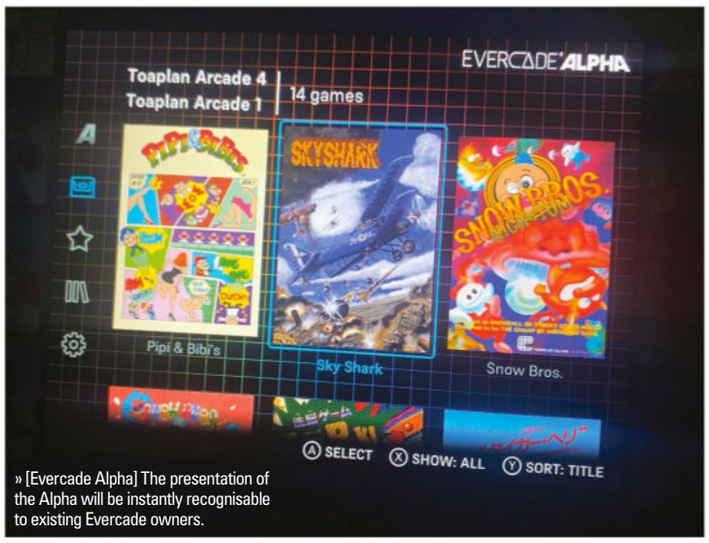
While we're on the subject of the Alpha's few negatives, it's worth mentioning Blaze's decision to create two separate machines, one with artwork dedicated to *Street Fighter*, the other to *Mega Man*. While we don't have an issue with the decision to create two cabinets, both machines look fantastic and it's inevitable that some will prefer the look of one to the other, the decision to spread games across both systems feels a slight against those collectors who have helped make Evercade a success in the first place. It feels particularly cheap when you consider that the Evercade EXP launched with 18 Capcom games. Anyway, the games that are included are *Street Fighter II Champion Edition*, *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*, *Street Fighter Alpha: Warrior's Dreams*, *Street Fighter Alpha 2* and *Street Fighter Alpha 3* for the *Street Fighter*-branded machine, while *Mega Man: The Power Battle*, *Mega Man 2: The Power Fighters*, *Carrier Air Wing*, *Final Fight*, *Knights Of The Round* and *Strider* are found on the *Mega Man* cab. Personally we feel the *Mega Man* cab is the better option, for no other reason than it offers stronger variety out of the box. It's also worth noting that only two games, *Final Fight* and *Strider* were found on the Evercade EXP, the rest are exclusive to the Alpha range.

While the included games list is rather paltry, there's obviously a large amount of games to play on the system thanks to the huge number of Evercade cartridges that are now available. We've been caning all the arcade collections and we've noticed no real issues with any of them. The machine seems more than capable of handling all the available arcade games, particularly the later Toaplan ones and most of the games look great on the screen (with the expected shimmer for certain resolutions). And it really is a lovely looking screen, being nice and sharp with good viewing angles. It's telling that no vertically oriented games are included within the 12-game Capcom selection as you do notice that empty space, but the screen is big enough that your playing experience isn't really compromised when playing games like *Burgertime*, *Batsugun* and *Alcon*.

Overall, we've been really impressed with the Evercade Alpha, even if it does come with a stingy amount of games. The build quality feels solid, the emulation is exactly what we'd expect from Blaze and it fits well into the Evercade's ecosystem. It doesn't feel quite as essential as past systems (it feels like a halfway house between the full-screen VS and the portable EXP) but if you can justify the outlay it's hard to see how you're going to be disappointed, especially if you already have a substantial Evercade library.

In a nutshell

It's certainly pricey and is lacking in built-in games, but the build quality is the best we've seen from Blaze and it's backed up by solid emulation and excellent presentation.



» [Evercade Alpha] The presentation of the Alpha will be instantly recognisable to existing Evercade owners.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Sonic X Shadow Generations

» **System:** PS5 (version tested), PS4, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X, Switch, PC » **Buy it for:** £44.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

Just in time for Shadow to make his debut in the *Sonic The Hedgehog* film franchise, we've got a collection consisting of a *Sonic Generations* remaster and the brand-new game *Shadow Generations*. *Sonic Generations* is one of the best-regarded 3D games in the series and the new version runs at 60fps, at a higher resolution than the 2011 console versions, and includes a few new features such as hidden Chao in each stage. Cutscenes have been revised and while the changes aren't ruinous, they do lose some of the fun in-jokes of the original version and feel largely pointless.

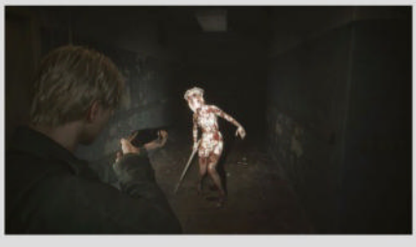
Shadow Generations adopts the structure of its predecessor, with Shadow revisiting versions of past stages using both 2D and 3D gameplay, while confronting his dark past. We had our doubts as to whether this could live up to the original game, but the stages are easily as good and maybe even slightly better – visually spectacular thrill rides that celebrate classic stages and thoroughly rehabilitate ones from Sonic's more regrettable outings, with plenty of divergent paths to explore and secrets to find. *Shadow Generations* is limited to an acceptable 30fps on PS4, but on PS5 you have the option to prioritise image quality or performance, with the 60fps of the latter feeling far better for a fast game like this.

Shadow also plays quite differently to Sonic thanks to his extra powers, like stopping time with Chaos Control and stunning enemies with Chaos Spear, and these feature prominently in the boss fights. You'll unlock Shadow's powers in a 3D hub world inspired by *Sonic Frontiers*, which is a big upgrade over the *Sonic Generations* hub world and offers plenty of secondary challenges, plus unlockable art and music. *Shadow Generations* is no small add-on, either – it's the equal of its predecessor, doubling the size of the overall package. That makes for the best 3D Sonic experience since *Sonic Generations* originally released in 2011, and fans shouldn't miss it.

» Score **86%**

» [PlayStation 5] Unlike Sonic, Shadow has the same move set in both 2D and 3D stages.

» [PlayStation 5] *Sonic Generations* runs at 4K on PS5 and 1080p on PS4, and still looks great.



Silent Hill 2

» **System:** PS5 (tested), PC » **Buy it for:** £59.99
» **Buy it from:** Online, retail

Bloober Team's remake of Konami's classic survival horror game is a substantial upgrade in many ways. Graphically it's phenomenal, with meticulous attention to detail that highlights the squalor of Silent Hill and the depravity of the monsters that haunt it. It sounds terrific too thanks to carefully placed sound effects, a gorgeous score and brand-new voice acting that enhances the new cutscenes. All is not perfect though, as decisions to increase the size of certain areas can make them feel tiresome to trek through, while the heavier focus on combat threatens to overplay the subtlety of the game's storytelling. It doesn't quite reach the dizzying heights of the original, but it's still going to bewitch old and new fans alike.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **85%**

A Tale Of Two Halves 1982-2010: The History Of Football Video Games

» **Buy it for:** £34.99
» **Buy it from:** bitmapbooks.com

Although Bitmap Books has dabbled in tomes dedicated to a single genre before, this is arguably its strongest for some time. It works because it's more than just a sum of its parts and as a result, gives a better indication of not only the evolution of the genre, but also its importance. Handily split into two-year seasons and wisely choosing to focus on series like *FIFA* and *Pro Evo* rather than their individual entries, each section has an overview of the two years along with key games and a fun little awards section that is repeated throughout the book. Misnamed surnames from unlicensed games are celebrated, some of the pixel art looks glorious and it's filled with fascinating trivia. An essential purchase for football fans.

DARRAN JONES

Blazing Strike

» **System:** PS5 (version tested), PS4, Switch, PC
» **Buy it for:** £34.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

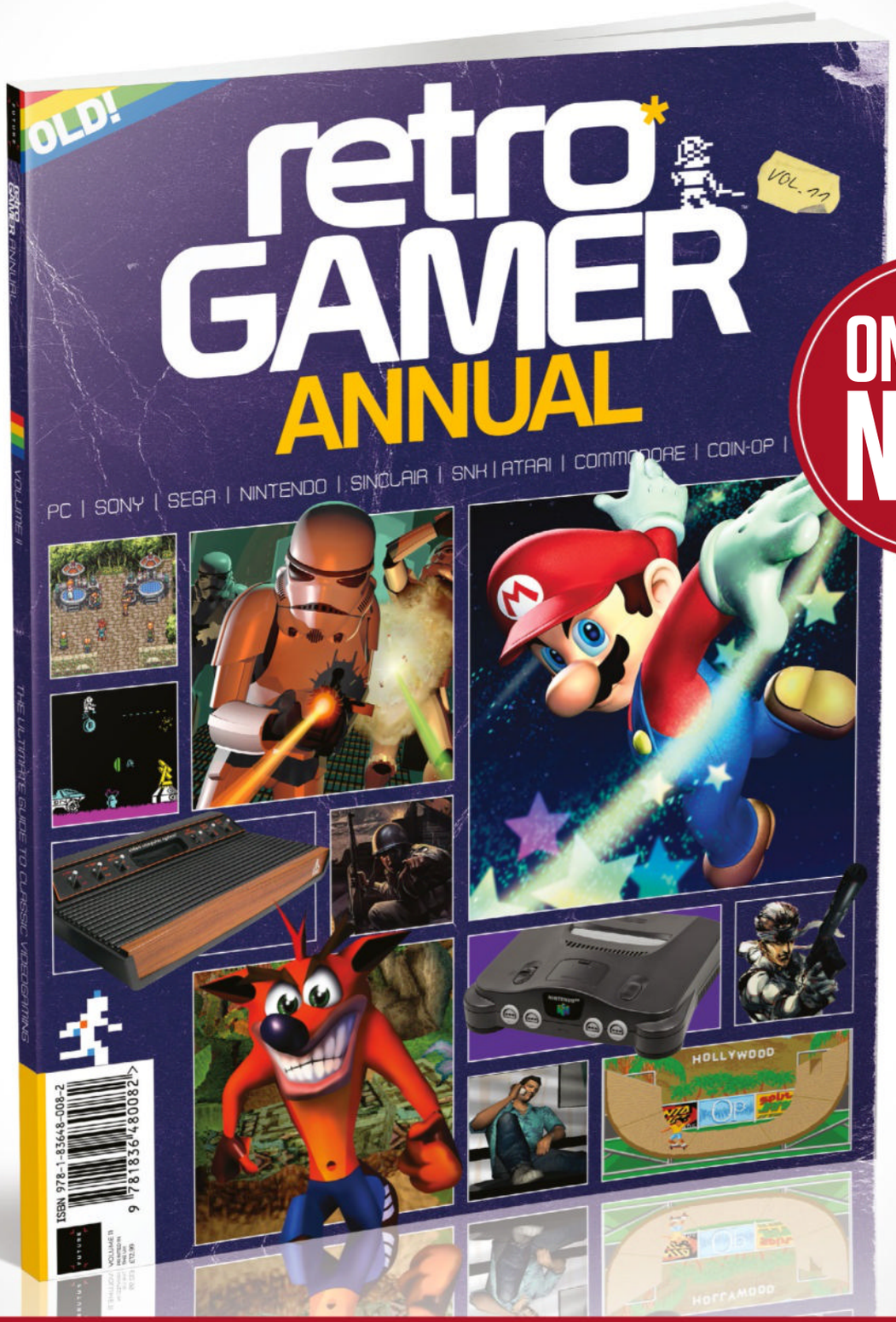
This fighter makes a good first impression, with a solid fighting system and attractive 2D visuals, with subtle scaling reminiscent of Neo Geo fighting games and detailed, well-animated fighters. The presence of online play is also a welcome surprise, given that it's an indie game with a small staff. Unfortunately, *Blazing Strike* falls short of expectations in several ways. Some issues are small, like the lack of additional single-player modes like Time Attack and Survival. The fact that you can end up with the same colour scheme in mirror matches, making it impossible to tell who's who at a glance, is a major and surprising problem. It's a fair effort, but needs major updates.

NICK THORPE

» Score **58%**

CELEBRATE THE BEST OF RETRO GAMING IN 2024

Our latest tome features an incredible amount of fantastic content from Retro Gamer's past 12 months. Iconic characters, huge franchises and classic systems all feature, making it an essential read for retro fans. Don't miss it!



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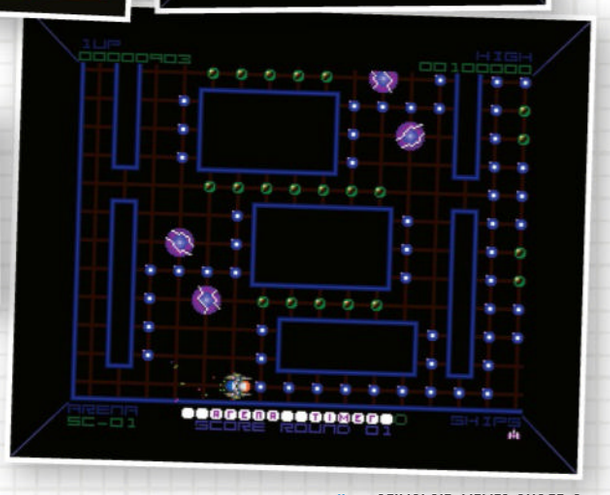
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>

<!--- [SINCLAIR NEXT] RUSTY PIXELS ALSO RELEASED A BRILLIANT NEXT CONVERSION OF KONAMI'S SCRAMBLE. --->

<!--- [SINCLAIR NEXT] RAMS CAN EASILY RUN JIM BAGLEY'S PAC-MANIC-MINER-MAN (MANIC MINER ON ARCADE PAC-MAN HARDWARE). --->



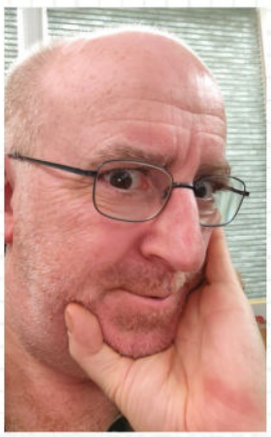
<!--- [SINCLAIR NEXT] CHASE A HIGH SCORE IN TYVARIAN 2'S HIDDEN MODE, SCOREVARIAN. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

SPLENDID SEQUEL

<INTRO> MICHAEL 'FLASH' WARE HAS BEEN A KEY SPECTRUM NEXT CODER, WITH TYVARIAN 2 – TO THE VICTOR THE SPOILS IMMINENT </INTRO>

<INTRO> IT'S MORE THAN 40 YEARS SINCE MOST OF THE HARDWARE WE ENJOY PLAYING HOMEBREW ON WAS DEVELOPED. AFTER THE SUCCESS OF 2023'S EVENT, MSX2 GOTO 40 IN THE NETHERLANDS WILL CELEBRATE THE UPGRADED MSX FORMAT – WITH KEY SPEAKERS INCLUDING ASCII CORPORATION COFOUNDER KASUHIKO NISHI AND KONAMI ARTIST NAOKI SATOH. VISIT MSXGOTO40.COM FOR MORE DETAILS. MEANWHILE, WE LOOK AT THE NEXT, GAME BOY, NES AND MORE IN THIS ISSUE WITH THESE GREAT NEW GAMES AND PREVIEWS. </INTRO>



<!--- MICHAEL 'FLASH' WARE IS BEHIND THE TYVARIAN GAMES. --->

<BODY> **A question from a prominent pixel artist led to Michael 'Flash' Ware's latest project.** "Simon Butler messaged me out of the blue to ask if I was developing for the Next," explains Michael. "I decided a revamp of C64 *Warhawk* may be a bit of fun. I wasn't much of a Z80 coder, but luckily Jim Bagley was there to nudge me in the right direction."

Michael went on to work with Simon on *Head Over Heels* (see boxout) and Jim on *Baggers In Space*. "Space Fractal wanted me to do a Next version of *Space Taxi* (which may still happen)," continues Michael. "I decided to make a quick demo to show him gravity and inertia. I used *Jetpac* as a template, and Jim said I should let the player explore more. With the help of Lobo and Space Fractal designing levels and coming up with ideas, it became quite a fluid process."

How does Michael handle Next development? "I use Sublime Text 4, along with SjasmPlus and CSpect," we're told. "SjasmPlus knows the extra Z80N opcodes, and CSpect is perfect for testing prior to hardware tests. They create a quick and simple workflow." The website rustypixels.uk has the game store, free downloads and Next tools to help development.

What inspired the original *Tyvarian*, the first game in Michael's trilogy? "I was a big fan of *Solar Fox* in the arcades. I decided to play with the 'ship in a grid' mechanic. It was not long before lots of ideas popped up (aided by Space Fractal). We set a goal to make each level introduce either a new mechanic or a new enemy. We wanted to offer an evolving experience. Something we extended much further in the sequel."

Michael was also keen to explain why the lead character, Tyvarian, is female. "It's partly because of the back story (revealed in the third game) and because there are few games with a female main

NEXT NICETIES

CROWLEY'S WORLD TOUR

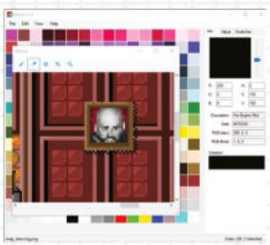
<"It started as *Horace World Tour*. Rather than go to a legal battle, I decided to rebrand it. So, Crowley was born," Michael says. />

HEAD OVER HEELS NEXT

<"I had never done an isometric game before, hopefully, I did the game and Jon Ritman proud." We'd certainly say so, it earned 90% in issue 264. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

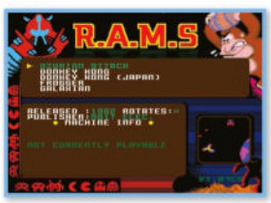


<!--- PALEDIT IS ONE OF RUSTY PIXELS' DEVELOPMENT TOOLS FOR THE NEXT. --->

character," he says. "Even though she is in a spaceship in the first two games, I always thought of a lady being at the helm with lightning reactions, a nerve of steel, and all that. I started thinking about why she was always after these crystals. I needed to round off the story. She is seen as a cat burglar, [but] there's a bit more to it, no spoilers."

But how will *Tyvarian* differ from the original game? "The main one is that the arenas are no longer just single-screen affairs," Michael explains. "Many elements were removed and replaced with new challenges. *Part 2* also has two special game modes to unlock, is much larger, and has many varied ships to select (slightly altering the way they control)." After the third *Tyvarian*, is he planning anything else? "I am working on *The Perils Of Crowley*, an action/puzzle game best described as *Sokoban* on steroids. This is being coded for the Next and PC/Switch." We look forward to more of Michael's wares. </BODY>

<INTRO> RUSTY PIXELS HAS BEEN A BIG SUPPORTER OF THE SPECTRUM NEXT </INTRO>



RUSTY ARCADE MACHINES (RAMS)

"Jim showed me an early version of *Pac-Man* being run using the arcade ROMs," says Michael. "We used shared code to run many more games."

TYVARIAN

"I realised there may be something a little more unique we could do with [*Solar Fox*]. We wanted to keep the player on their toes."

WARHAWK

"I would like to do another *Warhawk* at some stage bringing it closer to the Nintendo DS version," which Michael wrote with Ben Baker.

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

Amstrad CPC: *Roland In Retroalacant* sees you control Roland Perry, collecting components to make an Amstrad CPC. Choose your price and buy it from bit.ly/roland-retro

Apple-II: Rewrite the US Presidential Election result with *Campaign Manager 2024* (also for C64). Rewrite history at bit.ly/campaign2024-apple

Atari Jaguar: The platformer *Jumping At Shadows* was released at the Portland Retro Gaming Expo. Hop to it and visit bit.ly/jumpingatshadows for more info

Atari ST/STE: *Shotgun* from Dr Wuro Industries features four-player deathmatch action and requires 1MB memory. You'll have a blast at bit.ly/shotgun-st for only $4.

BBC Micro: Save sheep from alien abduction in *Infinite Porridge*, Alec Baker's take on *Defender* for Model B machines. Fly over to bit.ly/infinite-porridge to play it.

ColecoVision: CollectorVision has four new titles to order – *Scramble, Legacy Of The Wizard, Fruit Panic* and *Parsec*. Order them over at collectorvision.com/store

NES: Lowtek Games released *Flea 2*, continuing the adventures of Henry The Hyperactive Flea. Bound on over to bit.ly/flea2-nes

PC: Check out the remake of *Olli & Lissa: The Ghost Of Shilmoore Castle* by Sunteam. Play it now by visiting bit.ly/olli-pc

PICO-8: Enjoy caravan shooter *EX Terra* from Loki Striker – bit.ly/exterra – and Sebastian Garcia's scrolling beat-'em-up *Backstreet Warriors*, which is at bit.ly/backstreet-p8

TRS-80: *THEM (Total Human Eradication Mandate)* from Spriteworx requires the MCX32-SD expansion module. Name your own price and get it from bit.ly/THEM-trs80

VIC-20: Games That Weren't and Hewco have preserved and enhanced Matthew Smith's 1983 release *Monster Munch*, written in BASIC for the unexpanded VIC. Play it at bit.ly/monster-vic

Hewco also released *Blue Meanies From Outer Space Enhanced* and *Bluevolution* (+3K), which is at hewco.itch.io/

Finally, *Steamed Hams* by Jeff Daniels is a work of complete genius. Enjoy it at bit.ly/steamed-vic

CHAMPION CODER

ANDREAS 'USER0X7F' WINHARD

<INTRO> AS A CHILD, ANDREAS DREAMED OF MAKING GAME BOY GAMES – NOW HE DOES </INTRO>

<INFO COUNTRY: GERMANY WEBSITE/ONLINE LINKS: USER0X7F.ITCH.IO FORMAT: GAME BOY PREVIOUS GAMES: GENESIS, BLACK CASTLE, GENESIS II, GUNSHIP DX, G-ZERO WORLD GP CURRENTLY WORKING ON: BLACK CASTLE II />

WHAT IS YOUR DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT LIKE, ANDREAS?

I use the Game Boy Development Kit (GBDK), Game Boy Tile Designer and Game Boy Map Builder. To draw backgrounds and sprites, I just use Windows Paint. />

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO MAKE YOUR GENESIS SHMUPS?

<Primarily it was *Solar Striker*. I'm a big fan, because of its simplicity, but I always missed more power-up options. The name was inspired by *Nemesis*. />

HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE IDEA FOR GUNSHIP?

<I came across *Operation Yabuka*. Unfortunately, the game was never finished and only an alpha version is available. I wondered whether it would be possible to make a game like this for the Game Boy. I discovered that there are hardly any on-rails shooters for the Game Boy, probably because the classic Game Boy cannot process sprite priorities. Adding the rumble wasn't very difficult. I came across the cartridge from Inside Gadgets. I thought that this feature would be perfect, searched the internet for specifications, and found what I was looking for relatively quickly. />

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?

<*Black Castle II*, which is one of my favourite games and I've been working on it for a while. At the moment there is only a prototype, and the game engine is not yet fully developed. />

WHEN WILL IT BE FINISHED?

<There is no deadline. I work on the project when I enjoy it. If I lose interest in it, I don't do anything more. A few days or weeks later, I might come up with something new and then I continue. The whole thing is just a hobby and the fun comes first. />

IS IT GOOD TO GET YOUR GAMES ONTO A PHYSICAL CARTRIDGE?

<Definitely! The feeling of holding the game you've put so much work into in your hands is indescribable. Every now and then I put one of my games in the Game Boy, even though I've played them hundreds of times. />

<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] THE LIGHTS ARE ABOUT TO CHANGE IN MODE 7-STYLE RACER G-ZERO WORLD GP. --->

<!--- THE IMPROVED GUNSHIP DX WAS PUBLISHED BY INCUBE8 GAMES. --->

<!--- [GAME BOY] THE VERTICALLY-SCROLLING GENESIS 2 FEATURES SOME GREAT BOSS FIGHTS. --->

DATA BURST

SPELUNKY64

<INFO FORMAT: COMMODORE 64 CREDITS: PAUL KOLLER (CODE, GRAPHICS), (SOUND & MUSIC) PRICE: $2.99 DIGITAL DOWNLOAD WEB: BIT.LY/SPELUNKY64 />

<BODY> **With the blessing of Derek Yu and Mossmouth, this official conversion is superbly done.** Armed with a whip, ropes, and bombs, you must collect treasure from 16 challenging caves while avoiding enemies, spikes, and other hazards. If you can find a shop, there are extra items to buy (including a handy compass that points to the exit, climbing gloves to cling to walls, and a parachute to save you from long falls). Getting hit by an enemy or falling too far costs a precious heart, but rescuing a damsel in distress and taking her to the exit of a level restores one. Spikes and certain enemies can unfortunately cause an instant game over, so be on the lookout for them. *Spelunky*'s graphics are small but brilliantly done, the music and simultaneous effects are brilliant, and the clever random-level generation is based on the publicly available source code. The four distinctive settings all look great, testing the player with increasingly challenging enemies and traps. Even the giant rolling boulder is in there, triggered if you try to steal a valuable golden idol. Every run feels different, and you gradually learn tactics like pulling diagonally down to hang from ledges. Minor omissions and niggles with the controls (especially getting off ladders) are forgiven as you experience a C64 classic. </BODY>

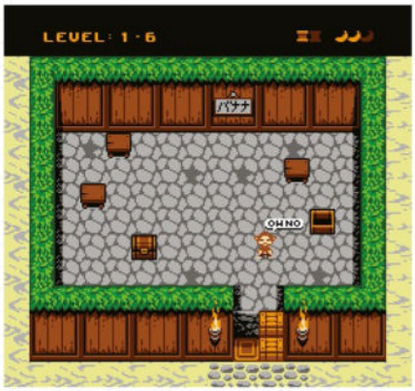
SCORE: 91%

<!--- [C64] OBJECTS CAN BE CARRIED BETWEEN LEVELS, INCLUDING THIS HANDY PISTOL. --->

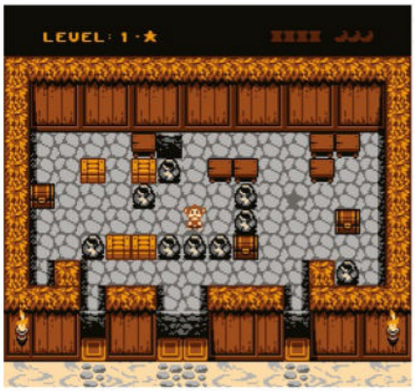
<!--- [C64] DON'T ANNOY THE SHOPKEEPER: HE WILL CHASE AND KILL YOU! --->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**



<!--- [NES] IF YOU CANNOT WORK OUT A LEVEL, PRESS SELECT TO RETURN TO THE LEVEL SELECT AND TRY AGAIN. --->



<!--- [NES] FIND ALL THE BANANAS TO OPEN A BANANA LEVEL, WHICH CONTAINS THE STAR NEEDED TO OPEN THE STAR LEVEL. --->

SOKO-BANANA

<INFO FORMAT: NES CREDITS: FLIP FOR FATE (MARCUS CALMFORS, STEFAN KRATZ) PRICE: $8.99 DIGITAL DOWNLOAD / PHYSICAL EDITIONS FROM $49.99 WEB: BIT.LY/SOKOBANANA / FLIPFORFATE.COM />

<BODY> **Skid The Monkey has mistakenly destroyed all the bananas – just before his island hosts the Great Banana Festival!** Now he must push crates around and pick up stray bananas to solve 55 challenging levels, set across five warehouses on different islands. New features are added as you progress, including collapsing pits, switches and teleporters. Crates keep moving until they hit something and can be used to open chests containing bonus bananas. Cute graphics, excellent music, and hidden secrets make this a great variation of the classic *Sokoban* (hence the title). With its brain-stretching gameplay and a lovely physical edition available, this is another great NES homebrew gem to add to your collection. </BODY>

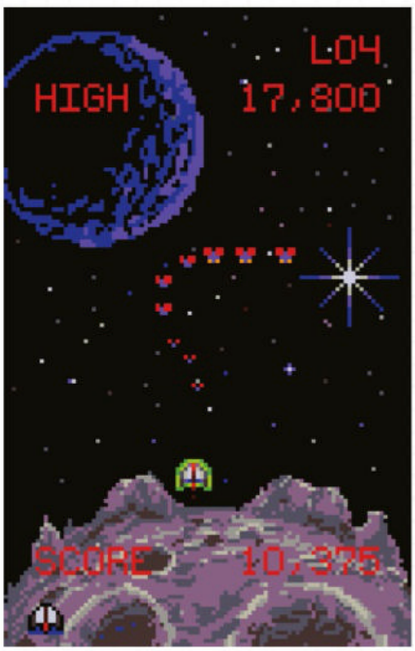
SCORE: 88%

MICROVADERS

<INFO FORMAT: ATARI LYNX CREDITS: SONGBIRD PRODUCTIONS (CARL FORHAN, DAVE DIES, ANDERLEX) PRICE: PHYSICAL CARTRIDGE WEB: SONGBIRD-PRODUCTIONS.COM />

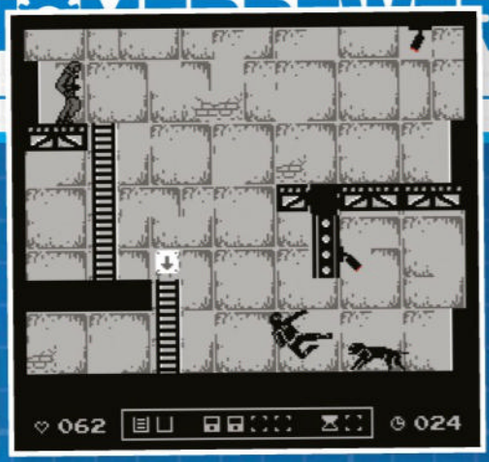
<BODY> **This *Galaga*-inspired shoot-'em-up has 40 levels of swirling attack waves to master.** The small but perfectly formed aliens swoop and dive at you, emerging in formations and there's some great boss fights too. You can turn the tables on your foes by collecting various power-ups, including a bomb that destroys all active enemies. *MicroVaders* features unlockable achievements, while progress and high scores are saved to the EEPROM. This is an entertaining old-school shmup which can be frustrating at times, but we still enjoy a quick blast on it. </BODY>

SCORE: 81%



<!--- [LYNX] COLLECT THE GREEN CAPSULE TO ACTIVATE THE SHORT-LIVED BUT LIFE-SAVING SHIELD. --->

THE HOMEBREWER'S PROCESSING

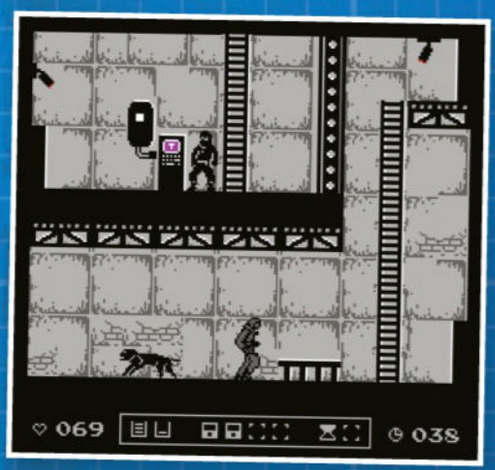


<INTRO> CHRISTIAN DINSE ON MAKING HIS ESPIONAGE-MAZE GAME, SABOTEUR FOR THE NES </INTRO>

<BODY> **Clive Townsend's classic game is being reworked for the NES by Christian Dinse.** "*Saboteur* was the first game I bought for the Schneider CPC 464 in 1990, and I was immediately fascinated by it," he says. "Recently I came into contact with Clive Townsend, something my 12-year-old self could never have imagined, and Clive gave me the green light to work on the game and also offered his help."

Rather than a conversion, it's loosely based on the 1985 classic. "What is similar is the structure, consisting of a ninja and 400+ individual screens in the form of a maze," says Christian. "However, the story is adapted to modern times, and the use of objects within the game world is different. The graphical presentation is also unique. It is planned to work with screen randomisation in places."

Having shared early images in May 2024, work had been on hold due to Christian's wedding – for which we send congratulations – but has now resumed. "The option to publish the game on original cartridges is available to me, but this is not planned from the outset," we're told. You can get all the latest news on *Saboteur* by visiting eastpixel.de/saboteur </BODY>



<!--- [NES] "THE CHOICE OF COLOURS HAS BEEN DELIBERATELY KEPT TO A MINIMUM," SAYS CHRISTIAN, WITH COMPUTER TERMINALS A NEW GAMEPLAY FEATURE. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

[Arcade] The *Street Fighter III* games introduced all manner of interesting characters. Darran personally loves Hugo.

CAPCOM'S FIGHTERS

The team get competitive over Capcom's best brawlers

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Yes, Namco has made some great fighting games over the years, but so have Capcom. To balance things out with this month's cover we've decided to take a look at the various 2D scrappers that the Japanese developer has published over the past few decades. How many did you enjoy?

DARRAN

So what makes a good Capcom fighting game?

TIM

Gems, ha! Yeah *Street Fighter X Tekken* was a bit of a mess.

NICK

In the early days, I think the thing Capcom really nailed was diversity of characters – the cast of *Street Fighter II* felt more different to one another than say, the *Mortal Kombat* fighters. The rest of the industry caught up to that though, so today it's harder to say.

DARRAN

I think *Street Fighter 6* proves that Capcom is still happy to innovate, but yeah, it's probably a little harder to nail down now. The diversity of characters in *SFII* really felt groundbreaking. Who was everyone's favourite?

NICK

I'm boring, so it's Ryu. He looked like the martial artists I saw at the local karate club.

TIM

Blanka initially, because I could stun people pretty easily, but that got changed after a few iterations. I eventually owned the Mega Drive version and learned all of the characters. I even spent one day beating it on the highest difficulty level thinking I'd unlock some special ending, which never existed – dunno how I got that into my head.

DARRAN

I was a big fan of Vega/Balrog even though you couldn't play as him. He was such a cool-looking boss and I was delighted to find out he was playable in the next game. Shame I'm absolutely terrible with him. So what makes *Street Fighter* so special?

TIM

Basically, and, if the rumour is true, accidentally, inventing combos. Then building on that over the rest of the series and others.

NICK

I think it's because the series has so often been a leader of the genre – not only with combos, but with super moves in the *Street Fighter II* series too. Heck, some credit *Street Fighter IV* with reviving an ailing scene, and *Street Fighter 6* has a Quest Mode that I won't be surprised to see ripped off in the future.

DARRAN

Yup, the excitement in the office when *Street Fighter IV* came out was tremendous. Two arcade cabs were wheeled into the games room and everyone was sneaking off to play it. I take it you remember that, Tim?

TIM

Yep, I was one of them sneaking off to the games room, I didn't get any work done that day – well, aside from extensive 'research'. But that felt really special, being some of the first to get to play it in the UK.

NICK

At least you got to play it! I couldn't get near the cabinet

> "I tried to get into Capcom Vs SNK 2, but it was impossible to play on the GameCube with its tiny d-pad"
>
> TIM EMPEY

» [PC] Capcom's next fighting collection features the likes of *Capcom Vs SNK 1* and *2*. We're quite excited for it.

» [Xbox 360] *Super Street Fighter IV* is another pivotal game in the *Street Fighter* series, but not everyone liked its art style.

when it was shown at ATEI 2009, I just had to shove a camera through the crowd and hope to get a decent shot of it.

DARRAN

It's inevitable that we'd all be talking about *Street Fighter*, but it's also worth mentioning SNK. You could probably argue that both company's games wouldn't have been as good without the two of them pushing each other (with Namco joining the brawl once the 3D era started).

TIM

I spent way too much money playing *Art Of Fighting* and never got very good at it – I only managed to do the massive fireball once I think, and it missed. I've always seen the SNK games as playing second fiddle to Capcom's.

NICK

It's funny, I never knew there was a rivalry as a kid so I just thought Dan Hibiki was some weird, random joke, rather than a jab at *Art Of Fighting*. But I do agree, even just looking at the animation in *Street Fighter III* and *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, you can see the effort that went into beating the other team.

DARRAN

It ultimately led to the crossover games, which I personally love. Anyone else a fan?

NICK

Yeah, although I wasn't at first – I hated *Capcom Vs SNK*'s ratio system when I first played it, and it took a while to get used to. The fantastic presentation and wealth of characters eventually won me over.

TIM

I tried to get into *Capcom Vs SNK 2*, but it was impossible to play on the GameCube with its tiny d-pad. Then *Street Fighter III* had its resurgence, so it took over most of my time. Never got the chance to play *Tatsunoko Vs Capcom* unfortunately, because that looked amazing.

» [Vita] Tim wasn't a fan of the Gem system used in *Street Fighter X Tekken*, even if the actual fighting mechanics were solid.

DARRAN

It plays as good as it looks, Tim. I know a lot of the *Vs* games are considered to be a little wonky when it comes to balancing etc, but the likes of *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* are still tremendous fun. We should also probably mention the *Darkstalkers* series. That's a franchise that needs a new game.

NICK

I'm surprised it's been dormant for so long, given the general love of all things spooky – even if I tend to play as BB Hood, who is more scary in the 'gun nut' way.

TIM

I thought Capcom re-released them a few years back on the proviso that if they sold well it'd make a new one? Guess they didn't sell well…

DARRAN

You're probably right, Tim. I'd imagine they're also secretly happy they don't have to actually bother to redesign Morrigan as well.

» [Dreamcast] Capcom's *Vs* games might not be the best-balanced brawlers, but they are a lot of fun to play.

» [Arcade] Tim used to love playing as Blanka. We bet he used to just spam Blanka's electricity attack. [I did not! – Tim]

» [PlayStation 3] *Darkstalkers* made its last appearance in 2013. This makes us quite sad.

READERS REACT

You share your favourite Capcom fighters with us

The Deviot

Super Street Fighter II Turbo. The core mechanics are refined, the balance of the roster is good enough that decades later, the tier lists see rotation. Plus, it's not as hard to learn for newcomers as they don't have to master parries, multiple level supers and cancelling.

ACO

Street Fighter Alpha 2. Quite well animated and flashy. Props to the SNES version for pushing the limits as well.

Mama Maji but spooky

Rival Schools has Team Up Attacks but is chiefly one-on-one. It holds a very special place in my heart, I'm still obsessed with its charismatic, well-designed characters to this very day!

Cherry Lambrini

Although I didn't play it until the *30th Anniversary Collection*, it's *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*. I was astonished at how good it looked and played, along with the excellent music and variety of characters. It reignited my love of one-on-one fighting games.

Darryl Leech

Capcom Vs SNK 2. The presentation, music and commentator were super entertaining. I loved the whole tournament narrative and getting to see Shin Akuma interrupt was awesome.

MrThunderwing

It's got to be a tie between *Street Fighter Alpha 2* on the Saturn and *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* on the Dreamcast. *SFA2* is just pure *Street Fighter* awesomeness, the anime-style graphics, the combos, the supers, the incredible gameplay. *MVC2* is just pure unadulterated chaotic fun.

Quick Man

Capcom Vs SNK 2. There has never been a Capcom fighter with more unique match ups, styles of play, and freedom of player expression.

Adrian Lynch

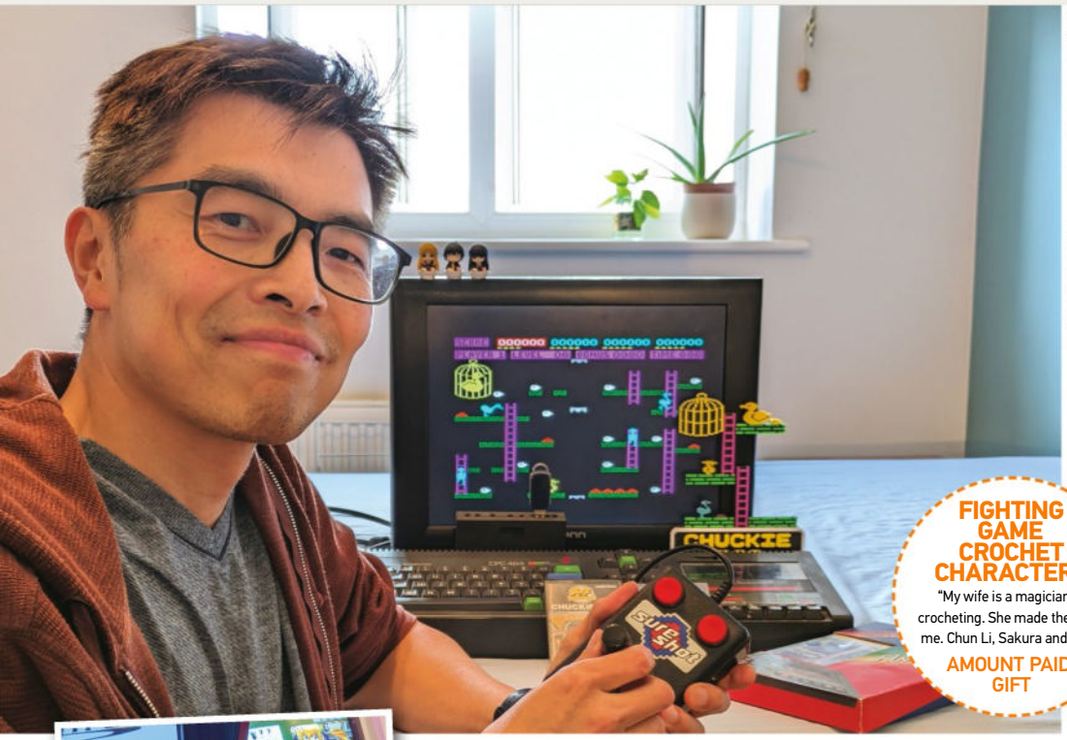
For impact it has to be the original *Street Fighter II*. Whichever came before the new characters is probably the peak, *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting* maybe?

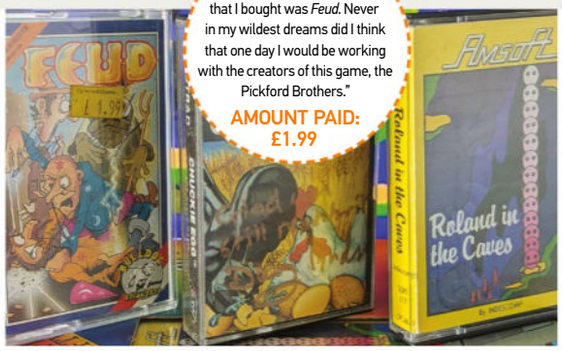
FruitLion

Marvel Vs Capcom 3. The perfect blend of accessible for newcomers and deep for experts. It still looks and sounds astonishing to this day and has a tremendous roster, particularly for including Okami and Phoenix Wright!

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**





FEUD

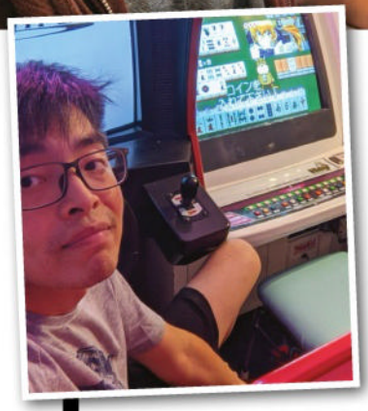
"The first Amstrad game that I bought was *Feud*. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that one day I would be working with the creators of this game, the Pickford Brothers."

AMOUNT PAID: £1.99

FIGHTING GAME CROCHET CHARACTERS

"My wife is a magician at crocheting. She made these for me. Chun Li, Sakura and Mai."

AMOUNT PAID: GIFT



BIO

NAME:
Chun Wah Kong

LOCATION:
UK

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
Prefer not to say

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Super Famicom

FAVOURITE GAME:
Double Dragon

TWITTER/INSTAGRAM:
@chunwahkong

COLLECTED WORKS

Childhood passions and career memories motivate this month's collector

Our latest collector loved videogames enough to make them his profession. Chun Wah Kong's family moved to the UK from Hong Kong when he was a child. "We lived with my dad's side of the family for a few years. His youngest brother; my cool uncle, opened up a new world of gaming for me. I owe him all my knowledge on the ColecoVision, the Vectrex and the Amstrad CPC 464.

"Back in the day in my spare time I would design my own games on paper and send them off to whoever my favourite games company was at the time," he tells us, not knowing if any of the letters have survived. "The first console that I bought where the decision was totally my own was the PC Engine. I had to buy it via mail order, a PAL converted one so I could plug it into the Amstrad monitor via the TV tuner." This led to an imported Super Famicom, before Chun would secure his first industry job.

"I had failed to get into uni and was spending way too much time at the arcades," he admits. "A friend suggested I should go for a tester's job at Software Creations. This moment changed my life, as I was given the opportunity to learn from some of the most talented people in the industry." From there, he worked on games such as *Plok*, *Tin Star* and *Maximum Carnage* before moving to Psygnosis. A number of PlayStation projects would end up cancelled, including a conversion of his PC game *Lander*, before he moved to Sony Computer Entertainment and worked as lead designer on *The Getaway* and its sequel.

As well as childhood favourites and memorabilia related to his own games, Chun has a real passion for arcade games, and he bought his first cabinet in 2000. "In 2007, with a couple of friends we started importing arcade machines by the container load from Japan. Everything 'retro' was still relatively cheap at the time and we had a lot of fun doing it. I met loads of great people who I would consider close friends now in this hobby," we're told. Chun still collects them too, telling us, "Currently I have two candy cabs, an *OutRun 2* and two pinball machines."

Though Chun has now left the industry, he still loves to collect and isn't out of the business of game creation entirely. "These days I only participate in game development on a hobbyist level. The most notable being my first C64 game *Millie And Molly*," which he worked on with Carleton Handley. "It had a physical release on cassette, 5.25-inch floppy and cartridge. I don't think I've touched a 5.25-inch disk since I was at school. It got quite popular and was ported to numerous platforms including the Atari 7800. This is the sort of game I like making. It took me a month of spare time and evenings during the pandemic to come up with all the puzzles." If you want to keep track of Chun's latest acquisitions, his Instagram is the best place to do it.

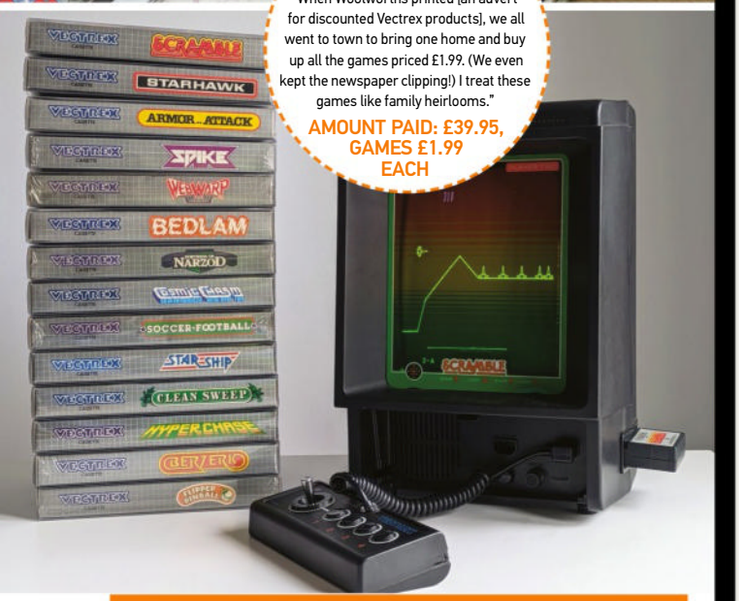
Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

PC ENGINE LT

"I sold a load of games and arcade spare parts to afford it seven years ago. I thought if I didn't buy it then, I'd be forever priced out. As a big fan of the PC Engine, it was the right thing to do."

AMOUNT PAID: £400



VECTREX AND GAMES

"When Woolworths printed [an advert for discounted Vectrex products], we all went to town to bring one home and buy up all the games priced £1.99. (We even kept the newspaper clipping!) I treat these games like family heirlooms."

AMOUNT PAID: £39.95, GAMES £1.99 EACH

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

THE GETAWAY PROMOTIONAL GOODS

■ "There was so much memorabilia for *The Getaway*. Here are some of my larger pieces – my double platinum plaque for 2 million sales in the PAL territory, Korean promo poster, UK promo pack and calendar. There's also a print advert from 2002 that fell from a train on the District line onto my lap and followed me home after a night out."

PAID: PROMOTIONS

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

TEKKEN 5

If you want a quick history lesson on this 3D fighting series, the PS2 port of *Tekken 5* is the game to go for since it's a great entry in the series that also includes the arcade versions of *Tekken 1-3* on the disc. Prices for complete copies range from **£10-15,** with slight variations depending on region and condition.

FAIRLIGHT

A copy of an original run version of *Fairlight* will set you back a little more than the average Spectrum game, about **£10-15.** Budget reissues on the Spectrum and other 8-bits rarely pass **£8.**

GIMMICK!

Trust us, the digital release is the way to go. A complete boxed copy of the Japanese release will cost you around **£850!** You won't save money with the PAL *Mr Gimmick!* release – that's about **£2,000** complete.

STUNT RACE FX

This Super FX-powered racer isn't one of the pricier SNES games. PAL and US NTSC copies are about **£6-7** loose, with complete PAL copies about **£22** and NTSC copies at **£28.** *Wild Trax*, the Japanese version, is about **£5** loose and **£18** complete.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY

You'll get a copy of this quickly if you're after a PAL one – complete copies are available for **£5-10** as it was reissued often. North American and Japanese copies are more scarce, and sell for around **£15** each.

THE THING

There's no horror when it comes to the price of *The Thing* – PAL Xbox copies start at just **£3,** and PS2 copies are around **£8-10.** PC copies are also affordable, generally found for under **£10** too.

GITAROO MAN LIVES!

If you want to rock out without splashing out, the PSP game is fortunately **£10-20** these days. That's much better than the PS2 original, as complete PAL copies of that sell for **£35-40.**

HOW MUCH?!

THE DEATH AND RETURN OF SUPERMAN

The seller of this rare Mega Drive game knew what they wanted, and just about got it, listing a complete copy for **£1,500.** It didn't exactly attract a bidding war, with just two bidders in the running, but that did mean it sold for a whopping **£1,550.** That's certainly Kryptonite to our wallets.

Prices correct at time of print

MOVIE NIGHT

Nick attends the premiere of The Rubber-Keyed Wonder

It's no secret that between the occasional development studio visit and sneaky previews of new games and hardware, writing for Retro Gamer is a job that comes with some perks. Typically, film premieres are not among them – tragically, even my unhinged devotion to a certain blue hedgehog doesn't get me a seat next to Jim Carrey. As a result, we were rather surprised to receive an invitation to the premiere of *The Rubber-Keyed Wonder*, the latest project from Gracious Films. As you might have guessed from the title, this documentary is about the creation, life and legacy of the iconic ZX Spectrum.

I was happy to make my way to London to attend on **Retro Gamer**'s behalf. The premiere took place at the BFI IMAX near Waterloo station, which is host to the UK's largest cinema screen, and that grand setting communicated the scale of the event. As I arrived at the venue and collected my tickets, the foyer was already abuzz with activity as attendees were having fun with several Spectrums that were set up throughout the room. Many familiar faces from the retro-gaming community were present, and it wasn't long before I bumped into **Retro Gamer** contributor Faith Johnson and Darren Melbourne of Retro Games Ltd, who was showing off the company's forthcoming The Spectrum hardware.

Entering the screen I found that I was seated right up front, and got the brief chance to say hello to Quang Nguyen, author of the *Jetpac*-inspired Game Boy Color game *Super Jetpak DX*. After a brief introduction from co-directors Nicola and Anthony Caulfield, the film began. It was very thorough in its approach, starting from Sir Clive Sinclair's earliest ventures with pocket calculators and the Black Watch at Sinclair Radionics, to the foundation of Science Of Cambridge. At this point, footage of an MK14 computer kit being assembled rolled, and I'm not sure I've ever seen electronics assembly being performed in quite that manner.

The film rolled on through the ZX80 and ZX81 era, into the Spectrum years. High points were covered, including the early success of the computer and an educational software deal that made for a memorable meeting with former prime minister Harold Macmillan. Likewise, failings like the unreliable Microdrives, the awkward launch of the ZX Spectrum 128 and the messy process of selling up to Amstrad were discussed frankly. Of course, there was no shortage of talk about the games, with many programmers and personalities popping up – including Graeme Mason, who will be familiar to our readers.

A Q&A session was held following the film, with Jason Bradbury – former host of *The Gadget Show* – acting as moderator for an entertaining talk. *Ant Attack* developer Sandy White revealed that the MK14 kit was his, and how he'd been asked, "Can you solder rhythmically, and maybe put some emphasis on components going into holes?" Grant Sinclair, Sir Clive's nephew, told the story of how he and some friends wrote a fortune-telling program that was likely the first software publicly shown on the ZX Spectrum, and LBC radio host James O'Brien admitted to hitting another boy at school for mocking the Sinclair C5.

There was no time for questions as a screening of *Megalopolis* was due shortly, to be introduced by Francis Ford Coppola himself, so the evening's festivities returned to the foyer. My attention soon turned to a ZX Spectrum+ that had become misconfigured, and after getting the joystick back into action I was quickly engrossed in a game of *Batty*. After that, I ended up back in conversation with Mark Howlett – a member of the film's cast, better known on social media as Lord Arse – and Faith about the joys of various drinking establishments in Essex. With the night winding down, it was time to bid farewell to Anthony and Nicola and start heading home.

I think *The Rubber-Keyed Wonder* is a film that most **Retro Gamer** readers would likely appreciate. Fans of the Spectrum will love it, but even if you're like me and it wasn't a core part of your gaming experience, the significance that the hardware has in the British computing and gaming businesses makes for a compelling tale. It has inspired me – between watching the film and taking delivery of a ZX Spectrum Next, I found myself eager to dive into this month's Minority Report on Spectrum games. I wouldn't be surprised if watching the film compelled others to revisit old Speccy favourites, and maybe find a few new ones too.

> "I think The Rubber-Keyed Wonder is a film that most Retro Gamer readers would likely appreciate"

DIVINE DOCUMENTARIES

SOME OTHER FACTUAL FILMS ABOUT GAMING THAT I'VE LOVED

THE KING OF KONG
It's an obvious choice, but it's popular for a reason – Steve Wiebe is a perfect underdog in his battle with Billy Mitchell.

NIGHT TRAP: 25 YEARS LATER
In less than an hour, the My Life In Gaming team do justice to one of the most important bad games ever made.

COMMERCIAL BREAKS: THE RISE AND FALL OF IMAGINE SOFTWARE
One of the earliest attempts to seriously report on the games business is just as interesting as Imagine's collapse.

I GOT NEXT
This documentary followed four top players as *Street Fighter IV* revived the American fighting game tournament scene.

8-BIT GENERATION: THE COMMODORE WARS
A perfect companion piece to *The Rubber-Keyed Wonder*, as it explores the history of the Commodore 64.

CAST, CREW AND FANS MINGLED IN THE FOYER BEFORE AND AFTER THE FILM

DARREN MELBOURNE SHOWS OFF THE SPECTRUM, THE NEW PLUG-AND-PLAY SYSTEM THAT'S OUT SOON.

THE BFI IMAX MADE FOR A SUITABLY GRAND VENUE FOR THE FILM PREMIERE.

AS YOU CAN SEE, THE HUGE THEATRE WAS NICELY PACKED FOR THE PREMIERE.

Images courtesy of Gracious Films

A PLAYER TRIES THEIR HAND AT MATTHEW SMITH'S PLATFORMING CLASSIC, MANIC MINER.
FROM THE MAKERS OF FROM BEDROOMS TO BILLIONS
THE RUBBER-KEYED WONDER
40 YEARS OF THE sinclair ZX Spectrum
THE DEFINITIVE DOCUMENTARY
FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE FILM, VISIT GRACIOUSFILMS.COM
PHIL CANDY
INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER - DICKINSON ASSOCIATES
THE RUBBER KEYED WONDER
SOME CONTRIBUTORS WERE CHOSEN FOR THEIR CLOSENESS TO THOSE WHO SADLY PASSED, LIKE RICK DICKINSON'S EMPLOYEE PHIL CANDY.
ALISON PAINE
SOFTWARE MANAGER - SINCLAIR RESEARCH
THE RUBBER KEYED WONDER
ALISON PAINE HAD INTERESTING TALES TO TELL FROM HER TENURE AS SOFTWARE MANAGER AT SINCLAIR RESEARCH.
ATTENDEES GET TO GRIPS WITH SPECTRUM GAMES AHEAD OF THE FILM.
THE Q&A SESSION AFTER THE SHOW WAS GREAT FUN. L-R: JASON BRADBURY, NICOLA CAULFIELD, ANTHONY CAULFIELD, SANDY WHITE, CLIVE TOWNSEND, GRANT SINCLAIR, CRISPIN SINCLAIR, JAMES O'BRIEN.

FACTUAL FAVOURITES

Readers pick their favourite gaming documentaries

Sloanysoft
I'm a huge fan of the late Andy Remic's *Memoirs Of A Spectrum Addict* films. All three of them have really interesting interviews with many legendary figures, some of whom have also now sadly passed. These documentaries are a fantastic legacy.

Game Music Gaiden
Ecstasy Of Order, *Man Vs Snake* and *Chasing Ghosts* were all interesting to me, but I love that classic arcade era. *Diggin' In The Carts* about game music was worth watching too.

Ray Povall
I really enjoyed *Atari: Game Over*. It was fascinating finding out about the 'worst game ever' *ET* for the 2600, and searching for the lost cartridges in a landfill site. I liked the game though.

Al Nilsen
Console Wars, but I'm a little biased.

Kyle Brown
High Score was a great series, shame it hasn't been renewed. The FPS documentary is good too if you've got a spare three hours.

Scott Julian
Once Upon Atari by Howard Scott Warshaw. It has some great interviews with the early Atari VCS game creators.

Justin Kyle
Easy – *Thumb Candy History Of Videogames* by Iain Lee. Has all the legends in it, best of all – Matthew Smith!

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!

» Would you buy **Retro Gamer** if the Amstrad CPC 464 was on the cover? Jason Perkins would.

COVER STORY

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

How come you've never featured the Amstrad CPC 464 on the cover of the magazine before? I know Darran is obviously a big fan of the system and there was a great selection of games featured in your last issue, but it feels wrong that such an iconic piece of hardware has never graced the cover. It's a genuinely fantastic computer with a great range of games and a gorgeous monitor (well the colour monitor at least). It's a shame we're unlikely to get an anniversary cover, as we're already in September. Can an Amstrad CPC 464 cover appear in a later issue please? I'd buy a copy immediately.

Yours hopefully,

Jason Perkins

Hi Jason, as much as we love the Amstrad CPC series, it just doesn't have the same pulling power as the C64 or Spectrum. It's extremely rare for any other 8-bit home computer to make the cover, but you never know. Maybe we'll reconsider it.

POWERFUL MEMORIES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

In issue 73 of your fantastic magazine you wrote about the game *Return Fire*. There was also a short note about its predecessor *Fire Power*. I used to play that game a lot with my cousin, split-screen on our Commodore PC II. We have good memories of that. Would you consider writing more extensively about *Fire Power*? It would be a nice piece of DOS nostalgia!

Kind regards,

Mark (Netherlands)

We've got a few strategy fans on the mag, Mark. Leave it with us and we'll see if we can put some sort of feature together.

PURE PASSION

Hi Darran,

I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed Collector's Corner in the latest issue (**RG** 264). The passion Declan (McWilliams) has for his *WipEout* collection really shined through. I also loved hearing about your own PS1 hidden treasures in My Retro Life. I was curious as to whether you have considered compiling a special Collector's Corner bookazine showing the best of this feature over the years? I for one would love to read this, as this, along with the Homebrew section, are my personal favourites. Anyway, keep up the good work!

Paul

We're glad you liked the collector-based coverage Paul. It's unlikely that a book about Collector's Corner would be commercially viable, but we'll

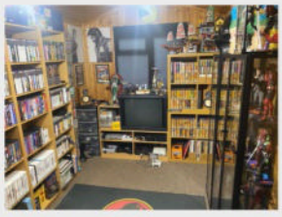
STAR LETTER

EXPANDING THE COLLECTION

Hi **Retro Gamer** team,

I love the magazine, and look forward to it arriving each month. This is probably a bit dull for a full feature or anything, but I'm always interested to see how collectors store their collections. As someone whose own retro collection is slowly growing (a mix of recently starting to buy older games, and buying as many newer retro collections on Switch or Evercade as I can get my hands on), I'm concerned about how much space my collection is starting to take up. With a one year old, and an incredibly understanding wife sharing the house with me, there's definitely a limit on how much I can have out, but I also don't really want to end up just putting a load of games in the loft to be forgotten about. I would be fascinated to know what other people's solutions are?

Cheers, PJ Montgomery



» Collections can easily get out of hand, so make sure you have a good idea of what you'd like to collect before you start.

Thanks for writing in, PJ. Space is almost always an issue for collectors. Nick has a couple of walls of his flat dedicated to his collection, while Darran is fortunate enough to own a gaming shed that doubles up as a place for work. If you are short on space, one of the best pieces of advice we can offer is to keep a curated collection. That way you should be able to tailor it to suit your needs.

» [Amiga] We don't have a PC image Mark, but hopefully this Amiga screen will still invoke strong memories for you.

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» Paul was really impressed with Declan McWilliams' *WipEout* collection as Declan's passion was plain to see.

DS is also celebrating its 20th anniversary this year and I was hoping you'll do a similar feature. It may not have been as graphically capable as the PSP, but it was still an astonishing little handheld that replaced the Game Boy brand and had a range of innovative games. I'd love to learn more about the technical hurdles developers faced when working on it.
Regards,
Jacob Baker

We're glad you enjoyed the PSP feature, Jacob. Don't worry, we're putting together something special for the DS' anniversary and you'll be able to read all about it very soon.

» Nick is already working on a Nintendo DS feature. You'll be able to read it soon.

certainly ask the bookazine team about it.

PORTABLE PERFECTION

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Thanks so much for celebrating the PSP's 20th anniversary recently. It's an incredible console and it was great to see it getting so much coverage. Having said that, it did make me realise that Nintendo's

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

The Analogue^{3D}

Both Nick and Darran are extremely interested in Analogue's new system. Darran is a big fan of Nintendo's 64-bit console and he already knows how good they can look when upscaled to 4K due to the RetroTink 4K. Nick on the other hand has been extremely impressed by the system's proposed price point. Needless to say, expect a review when it's finally released in 2025.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Who's your favourite Tekken character?

» Steve Hughes is a big fan of Paul's hairdo, and we don't blame him, it's quite the barnet.

James Harvey
Yoshimitsu. Come on, the guy has a sword!

RedCyclonelnc
Lee was OK but when they changed him up for *Tekken 4* he became so much cooler and his style went to 10/10.

Nightquaker
Hwoarang, cause I like his moves. Yoshimitsu for his design.

Brian
Baek Doo San was the first character I mastered in *Tekken 2*. He's still my favourite.

Paul Darbyshire
Tekken 2 era Jun Kazama here. Great stage music, infinite combo and she can counter Yoshimitsu's sword attacks!

PD
As a wrestling fan it can only be King, lariats for the win

Steve Hughes
Been a Paul man since the start. Nothing more satisfying than sending someone flying with a Death Fist. Plus look at his hair! Glorious.

The Poppies
Nina Williams for me. I like her fast fighting style. Not the easiest to learn but worth the effort for sure.

Jesse
Marshall Law. Most faithful representation of Bruce Lee in a fighting game, at least in terms of move set.

Antony Longmore
Steve Fox – he is a unique fighter and if you can master him, he is untouchable

Chris
Lei is my main, as a fan of Hong Kong movies he was my way as playing as Chow Yun-Fat.

Robert August de Meijer
Paul in *Tekken 4* has interesting set-ups and ways to play with frame advantage. And he wins with tactics instead of combos/strings.

retro GAMER

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Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk. For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

ISSN 1742-3155

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Gitaroo Man Lives!

STAY TUNED FOR MORE ROCK & ROLL

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You don't have to be good at a game to enjoy it. I mean, it obviously helps, but I've plenty of games that I love, even though I'm never likely to master them. *Gitaroo Man Lives!* by iNiS is a perfectly good example.

While I love rhythm action games, I'm not particularly good at them. *Gitaroo Man* is one of my favourites due to its interesting gameplay mechanics, an entertaining story, larger-than-life characters and a genuinely excellent soundtrack. It's a tricky game to master thanks to some complex pattern layouts and the fact that you need to use the second analogue stick to follow a trace line, which can take a while to get used to.

Each song is largely split into three distinct sections: Charge, Attack and Guard. While Charge and Attack use the aforementioned trace line, Guard instead requires you to press different button combinations as they fly towards the centre of the screen. I find this section bad enough when playing on the PS2, but the narrow screen layout of the PSP makes this section even trickier, as it feels like there's less time to react to the on-screen prompts that come from the top and bottom of the screen.

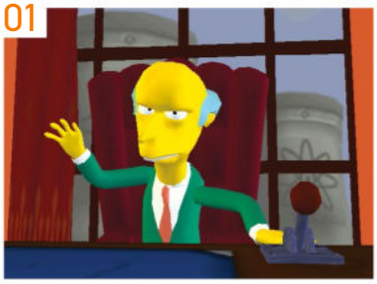
While the PSP game features a few neat additions like the inclusion of two extra stages and a duet mode, one of the things I do love about it is how you can slap a pair of headphones in and get totally lost in the game. Granted, you can do that on the PS2 as well, but there's something rather magical about listening to *The Legendary Theme* as you do battle with the screen just a few inches from your face. It's absolutely absorbing and genuinely gripping. I've still yet to complete the final stage, but the amazing soundtrack and clever play mechanics have certainly kept me trying over the last 18 years. ✱

ENDGAME

THE SIMPSONS: ROAD RAGE

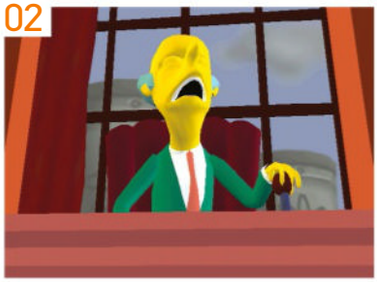
» Mr Burns has bought all the buses in Springfield and made them radioactive. Why? To give the town's residents a flimsy excuse to moonlight as cabbies in a game that takes plenty of inspiration from *Crazy Taxi*. So how does this mad caper end? Well, dear reader, let's take control of Homer and find out for ourselves.

01



» The residents of Springfield keep moaning about the scary glowing buses, and the local billionaire hasn't "seen a display of civil disobedience this contemptible since the Summer Of Love".

02



» So Monty Burns is peeved. Narked. Put out. The proles just don't know their place. He hands back the transit system, but amuses himself by activating the trap door to send you plummeting.

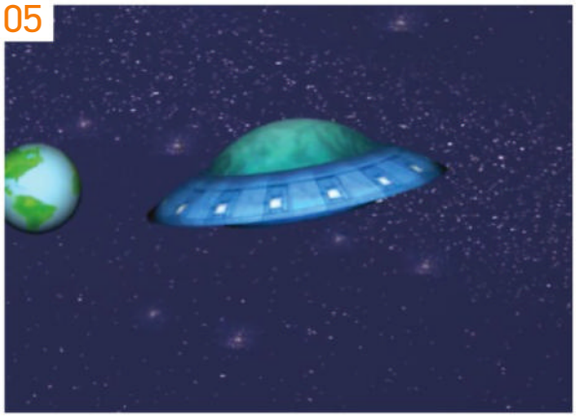
03

» Kang and Kodos, watching from their spaceship, declare that *The Simpsons: Road Rage* has become tiresome. A suggestion is made to play "the alternate game disc" – whatever that is.

04

» It turns out to be a game that is, for very important legal reasons, like *Pong* but definitely distinct from *Pong*. Which is funny, because *The Simpsons: Road Rage* is a game that is, as EA would have you believe, like *Crazy Taxi* but definitely distinct from *Crazy Taxi*.

05



» The two aliens do their evil laugh as they fly far away from Earth, presumably to buy a copy of *Not Galaga*. As the credits roll, Comic Book Guy declares it the, "Worst. Videogame. Ever." That's harsh, it's hardly *The Simpsons Wrestling* – it just doesn't have any original ideas.

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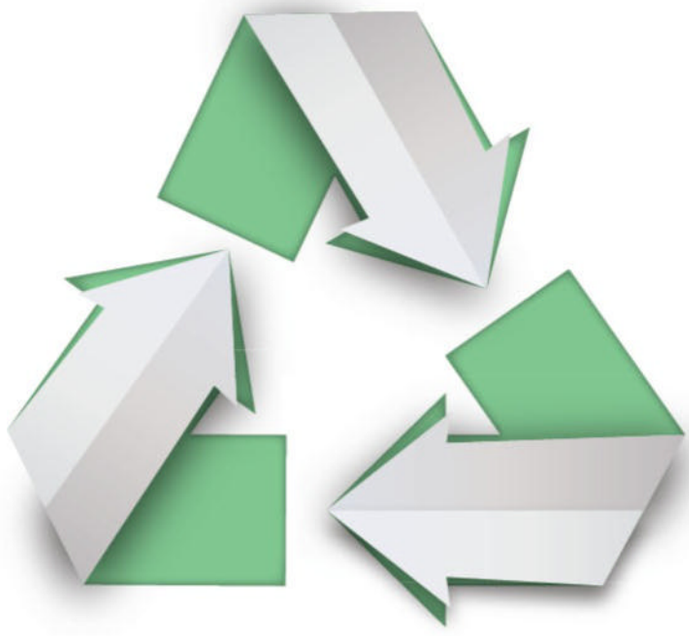

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